

University of Nevada, Reno

**Hispanic-Latino/a Youth Geographies of Commercial Space and Place in Wells
Avenue, Reno, Nevada**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in
Geography

by

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August 2023



THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

We recommend that the thesis
prepared under our supervision by

entitled

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the
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Abstract

Commercial spaces are often sites of history, culture, community, and change (Hayden, 1995; Steigemann, 2019). Studying the individual attachments people feel within commercial spaces through experience, connection, and community engages how the *process* of change that occurs within culturally significant commercial spaces is interpreted. This study looks at the Wells Avenue commercial District in Reno, Nevada, which has been home to many Hispanic-Latino/a communities since the 1990s (Berry, 2004), and is now experiencing substantial change through preservation, conservation, and commercial revitalization efforts (Majewski, 2015; Palma & Ocampo, 2021). Today, Wells Avenue is seen by many as a space which is gentrifying; meaning that its recent ethnic roots as a site of working class Hispanic and Latino/a community is being displaced (Palma, 2021). For others, Wells Avenue is growing, redeveloping, and creating new opportunities for investment (Hidalgo, 2021). In a District characterized by conflicting perceptions of space and its meaning, I examine the experiences of Hispanic-Latino/a young adults to investigate how young people of color interpret and imagine change in Wells Avenue. This research argues that the effects of spatial processes like gentrification in commercial space through the Hispanic-Latino/a youth is nuanced and embraces both disadvantages and benefits for established communities. By examination of Hispanic-Latino/a young adult experiences, interpretations, and imaginations of commercial change in Wells Avenue, results show that this is a space of cultural importance, “bittersweet” change, and an inclusive and multicultural future.

Acknowledgements

There are many people who I would like to thank for encouraging, supporting, and sitting with me through the highs and lows of my master's program.

First, I'd like to thank my advisor Dr. Jessie Clark for supporting every step of this thesis project. It has been an amazing experience to work alongside Jessie through this work, as well as our work with health and housing. Something that I am particularly grateful for is the fact that Jessie will always ask you how you are before discussing any work. Jessie is truly set apart and has been one of the best professional mentors I could've asked for. Thank you, Jessie, for all the support and constant encouragement.

I would also like to thank my committee members Victoria Rios, Dr. Scott Kelley, and Dr. Sarah Mitchell for being part of this work. I am extremely appreciative for their collaborative roles, and time to support this thesis. Thank you all for being interested and engaged in this work, it's been so fun working with you all.

Additionally, I'd like to acknowledge the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers for the Ford-Arreola Fieldwork-Archival Scholarship. This scholarship has helped support this thesis work.

I also want to acknowledge my participants who took time to be part of this research. Many shared parts of their lives with me, and I am grateful to have had the chance to meet and share pieces of their stories. This thesis would not be possible without their vulnerability and willingness.

Lastly, I would like to thank my church, my community, and God. When I moved here two years ago I didn't know anybody, and now I have more support than I could've

ever imagined. Without this community and my closest confidants, this work would not have been possible. Thank you all.

To my grandma, Martha Rodriguez, thank you for your endless love and a message I'll always hold tight to, "Que Dios te acompañe y siempre tengas esa sonrisa eres muy importante para mí. Te quiero mucho mi amor."

To the best man I've known, my Papa. The last thing you gave me was a dictionary of geography terms, and boy was it old. Thank you so much for that. You were one of the smartest and most hardworking people I ever knew. Thank you for being such a good man, and always supporting me.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

An established store where Hispanic-Latino/a children shopped with their families on a Saturday for quinceañera dresses disappears, and a new coffee shop opens in its place. There are the sounds of cars honking at one another, causing people to fear walking across the street. A rundown bar sits adjacent to one of the only Salvadorian restaurants in the city. The smell of the taco trucks on a Friday night after a long day of working permeates the street against the sound of people laughing in front of the Mundo Latino. The unhoused rest on the sidewalks and ask for food and money. Young people walk by shops in search of a good place to grab a drink and hang out. Murals line the sides of buildings, representing a new aesthetic, contrasting the tagging underneath umbrellas and on the stop signs. This is the *process* of change in the historic district of Wells Avenue, which has served as the center of the Hispanic-Latino/a community in Reno, Nevada since the 1990s.

Wells Avenue is a dynamic district which has embraced many cultures and communities throughout the brief history of Reno-Sparks (Majewski, 2015; Palma & Ocampo, 2021). Today, Wells Avenue is seen by many as a space which is gentrifying; it is socially, culturally, and economically displacing its recent ethnic roots (Palma, 2021). For others, Wells Avenue is growing, redeveloping, creating new opportunities for investment, and being a public gathering especially for and amongst young people. Commercial and urban spaces have often served as sites of important cultural and ethnic engagement for communities on the margins (Arreola, 2004; Hayden, 1995; Zukin,

2012). Many aspects of commercial urban life allow space for communities to build collective identity and sense of belonging in place (Rios & Vasquez, 2012; Steigemann, 2019). Through processes like gentrification (Doucet, 2009; Leyshon, 2023; Smith, 1996) and the COVID-19 pandemic (Bissell, 2020), urban commercial landscapes undergo changes that reflect the interests of development and finance. Among businesses and neighborhoods most affected through processes like economic dispossession and displacement are communities of color and immigrant communities. This research asks: How do Hispanic-Latino/a young adults experience, negotiate, and produce social connection, mutual identity, and a sense of place through engagement with the Wells Avenue commercial District in Reno, Nevada in a gentrifying post-COVID context? As this thesis focuses on Hispanic-Latino/a young adults, ages 18-28, and their perceptions of changes in the commercial landscape. Wells Avenue District is an important center for Hispanic-Latino/a culture, community, and ethnic identity, building in the form of residential neighborhoods and small businesses (Lopez, 2015). Many of the participants in my study grew up living in or visiting Wells Avenue with their families and thus can speak about changes in the commercial space through different perspectives from the past, present, and future. This perspective not only engages how young Hispanic-Latinos/as imagine urban commercial change, but how they experience it.

Work in youth geographies focuses on the experience, perceptions, and practices of space and place amongst young people. The emphasis of this work is the agency of individuals who are often marginalized or seen as passive participants in geographic place processes. Instead, young people are rebellious or contentious subjects, who are not fully 'children' but not fully 'adult' (Wood, 2015; Valentine, 2010). This thesis takes

seriously the young adult perspective to understand how youth understand place-based change in a neighborhood of importance to their community. To support this literature, I also bring another perspective from the margins to focus on youth of immigrant backgrounds and young people of color. To support my focus on youth geographies of place, I rely on important figures in geography who have studied place and sense of place - Doreen Massey, Yi-Fu Tuan, Gillian Rose, Tracey Skelton, and Stuart Aitken. Finally, I utilize work in urban geography on gentrification, a process that my participants specifically identified by name as an important feature in Wells, to explore how youth identify, understand, and respond to processes of gentrification and neighborhood change. Notably, I follow scholars like Brian Doucet, Melissa Butcher, and Luke Dickens who critique gentrification literature for its binary and unidirectional approach in interpreting its effects (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Doucet, 2009). The research is primarily focused on commercial spaces as targets of change, but also important sites of memory and sense of place for participants. To describe the importance of commercial spaces in the construction of a sense of place for youth, I rely on works from individuals like Anna Steigemann (Steigemann, 2019), a professor in sociology, and geographer Daniel Arreola (Arreola, 2004).

I worked with 13 participants ranging in age, geographical background, and life experiences. The ages of my participants ranged from 18-28, and 11 of the 13 have been in the Reno-Sparks area since childhood or birth. Two of the participants are from Las Vegas, Nevada, and moved to Reno in the last few years but live in the surrounding Wells neighborhood. Eleven of my participants describe their identity as being second generation American, or having grandparents that were immigrants. To explore the youth

narrative and get an understanding for how Hispanic-Latino/a young adults engage with a commercial space like Wells Avenue, this research utilizes a multi-method qualitative approach to understanding experience. My methods include walking interviews and an associated photo activity. Walking interviews engage a deeper understanding of lived experiences in particular spaces and places, providing insight to how my participants embody experience in place (Macpherson, 2016; Riley & Holton, 2016). It does so by directly engaging in the space or place. Hannah Macpherson writes: “walking is not a benign or neutral approach to researching landscape. Rather, it is a method of opening relational spaces of self and landscape” (Macpherson, 2016, p. 431). The embodied disposition of walking engages histories, cultures, and experiences of place (Macpherson, 2016). Participants also capture photos which give perspective to meaningful spaces and places along Wells Avenue. These photos are insight to the memories, emotions, and imaginations of this commercial space through the lens of my participants (Pink, 2007). Data collection took place from November 2022 – March 2023.

In addition, Chapter 2 is a comprehensive analysis of scholarly literature which provides context for the research question at hand. Chapter 3 is a background of the Wells Avenue commercial space, and methods used to conduct the study. Out of this data collection and analysis, three major themes emerged. The remaining chapters follow a sequential manner which speak to the past, present, and future of youth memories and imaginations in Wells Avenue. Chapters 4 is the first chapter of results which looks at the histories and memories of Wells Avenue for my participants. Chapter 5 examines the position that my participants sit in now within Wells Avenue, and how they interpret a

changing commercial space. Chapter 6 envisions the future of Wells Avenue through the lens of my participants.

For young people, being in the Wells Avenue commercial space is a reminder of a nearby past which involves familial and communal engagement. Today, this commercial space undergoes many changes which are perceived as the process of gentrification and enduring effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. With a range of mixed emotions and perceptions around change in this commercial space, participants explain their desires and hopes for this cultural and historic district. Many find the change in Wells Avenue to be a 'bittersweet' reminder of the past, with a hopeful future in mind. Many participants grew up with their families and community in this commercial space, and desire to see the culture remain. Participants also desire a future that is inclusive for all communities and takes into consideration marginal perspectives. I propose that the lens of the Hispanic-Latino/a young adult individual magnifies the significance and the future of the Wells Avenue commercial space through a temporal lens. I also identify Wells Avenue in a couple ways, 1) I use Wells Avenue Commercial District or Corridor to describe the commercial setting and ascribed boundaries of this area (Majewski, 2015) and 2) I use Wells commercial space or place as a way of talking about the qualitative description of Wells, as perceived, experienced, and lived in.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

This thesis explores the past and present connections young Hispanic-Latino/a adults hold with a historically Latino commercial district experiencing gentrification and pandemic-induced changes, in addition to how these connections foster a sense of place. As a part of this research, I am especially interested in understanding how young people of color and of immigrant background perceive neighborhood change. I focus specifically on young people's engagements with commercial spaces. Commercial spaces are important types of urban landscapes that facilitate, change, or undermine a sense of place and belonging, especially for young people, because they are spaces where young people can practice their autonomy and agency (Skelton, 2010), and a space where young people themselves are signifiers of change in commercial landscapes (Steigemann, 2019). In this chapter, I first describe the major contributions of Youth Geographies to scholarship on the relationship between youth and space, place, and sense of place. To this work, I discuss the importance of commercial spaces in facilitating a sense of place and belonging for marginal groups like immigrant communities, communities of color, and young people. Next, I review key literature in urban geography on gentrification as a form of neighborhood change affecting commercial spaces that reinforces social inequality in place a potentially undermines cultural connections to place. In this section, I also discuss work in Geography discussing COVID-19 impacts on place. Finally, I return to the literature in Youth Geographies that discusses the agency of youth in creating and imagining place, wherein youth complicate traditional narratives of place

identity and neighborhood change vis-a-vis processes like gentrification through practice and intersectional lenses.

Youth Geographies and Sense of Place

This research focuses on youth along with youth connection to place and sense of place in the Wells Avenue District of Reno, Nevada. Many participants frequently used the terms ‘space’ and ‘place’ when describing their experiences and interactions within Wells Avenue. Where possible, I use the theory to support and contextualize how my participants are defining and using these terms. Feminist geographer Doreen Massey suggests that “space is rather a simultaneity of stories-so-far, [and] then places are collections of those stories, articulations, within the wider power-geometries of space” (Massey, 2005, p. 130). Massey is describing space as not just a static geographic location, but a dynamic network of practices, processes, and power relations which constitute the context for the world we live in; it is always becoming (Massey, 2005). Whereas place is a specific location and destination where the various dimensions of spatial interpretation exist (Massey, 2005). I contextualize the meanings of space and place through the responses and descriptions of Wells Avenue provided by young people.

Youth geography is a discipline within human geography which reinserts the young person as a distinct agent of interpreting, manipulating, and engaging place (Evans, 2008; Kallio et al., 2016). This discipline encompasses a more comprehensive understanding of youth conditions by giving voice and focus to the experiences and perspectives of young people (Aitken, 2001; Massey, 2005; Skelton & Valentine, 2008). Historically, the perspectives and experiences of children and youth were not considered as agents of change and interpretation for spaces and place (Skelton, 2010),

today both children and youth are considered active individuals in space and place. Both child and youth geographies arise from the same roots/need, but there is something distinct about ‘youth,’ which is the *transition* that this group embodies (Valentine, 2019). Youth embody a temporal (Wood, 2015) and intergenerational (Vanderbeck, 2007) narrative where they are shifting both in age and within their family networks (Valentine, 2019), where ‘children’ are seen as ‘becoming adults’ (Valentine, 2019). This sets youth apart, where they sit in a tension of being an ‘adult’ and ‘becoming adult’ (Valentine, 2019).

Much of the scholarship in Youth Geographies is informed by humanist and feminist attentions to place and space. Feminist geographies examine the role of gender in space and place, but also examines the “spatial dimensions of the different life experiences ... across a host of cultural, economic, political, and environmental arenas” (Dixon & Jones III, 2006, p.42). Feminist understanding is, among other items, focused on *differences* in space, place, experience, and culture (Dixon & Jones III, 2006). This focus uncovers a piece of feminist cultural geography, as it aims to investigate the marginalized and undiscovered, along with how these existences play a role in shaping everyday places and spaces of life. The feminist perspective complexifies space and place through various understandings with an examination of space and place itself (Dixon & Jones III, 2006; Massey 1994). Fundamental feminist scholar Doreen Massey reveals that place and space are dynamic, subjective, and unfixed (Massey, 1994):

Identities of places are inevitably unfixed. They are unfixed precisely because the social relations out of which they are constructed are themselves by their very nature dynamic and changing. They are also unfixed because of the continual production of further social effects through the very juxtaposition of those social relations (Massey, 1994, p. 169).

This theoretical outline identifies social relations as an interpretation by re-envisioning space and place as having nuance. As Massey notes, relationships within space and place are also contingent upon the temporality and histories within it: “A sense of place which is extraverted as well as having to deal with and build upon an inheritance from the past” (Massey, 1994, p. 142). This framework inserts that space and place are interrelated with individual interpretation and relationships alongside dynamic and unfixed shifts in space and place over time (Massey, 1994).

This thesis is particularly interested in the experiences, practices, thoughts, and imaginations that inform a sense of place for young people. ‘Sense of place’ is a concept that originates in the work of early Humanist geographers in the 1970’s. Scholars who study *sense of place* focus on the connections between individuals and place through experience, social interaction, and identity creation (Massey, 1994; Hooks, 2009; Rose, 1995; Tuan, 1974/1979). Famously, early Humanist geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan, explores a *sense of place* through personal attention and intention given to place (Tuan, 1974/1979). He writes, “People demonstrate their sense of place when they apply their moral and aesthetic discernment to sites and locations” (Tuan, 1979, p. 410). It is the intimacy and subjectivities of personal encounters with place which create a *sense of place* for the individual (Tuan, 1974/1979). Feminist scholars find a *sense of place* to be interpreted by individual experience but also the complex social relations of power in place (Massey, 1994; Hooks, 2009; Rose, 1995). The feminist perspective has become important in the work of geography to highlight the difference in experiences and interpretations of space and place by various genders, ethnicities, and ages (Massey, 1994). Gillian Rose writes,

“The concept of “sense of place” refers to the experiences, emotions and identities that are connected to places and can be seen as a part of the system of meaning through which we make sense of the world” (Rose, 1995, p. 99). Key to the feminist perspective is that multiple senses of place can exist in different spatial scales and time (Massey, 1994; Rose, 1995). Massey writes:

Instead, then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent. And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world which integrates in a positive way the global and the local (Massey, 1994, p. 154/155).

The caution proposed by feminist scholars is that space and place are consistently constructed and reconstructed through various scales of meaning and experience (Massey, 1994; Rose, 1995). The aim of this research is to study the dynamic notions of space and place as it is understood by the youth and their individual creations of *sense of place*. Cultivating a sense of place is also not always a positive process but can be formed through negative associations and experiences (Tuan, 1974/1979).

These definitions of place and space are important for this project, seeing place as a set of relations and practices that are dynamic and link between local and global (Massey, 1994/2013). For example, this research is interested in how young people perceive social and economic change in Wells Avenue. Their experiences and perceptions of place are informed by broader social and economic processes that are changing the landscape; things like COVID-19, urban development, and patterns of investment and disinvestment in the neighborhoods (Palma, 2021). Understanding place

as a dynamic process thus clarifies people's perceptions over time and how people react to changes in the landscape. Lastly, space and place as a process/practice, instead of a fixed object, opens a space for agency and active creation of space and place. If space and place is a product of relationships, then young people must necessarily be understood as important agents of space and place (Jeffrey, 2012).

The adjacent work of Youth Geographies compliments feminist theory by investigating how youth and young people hold agency, transform, and exist within these dynamic and unfixed spaces and places. Geographer Tracey Skelton investigates youth and young people as agents of change and power through political discourse (Skelton, 2010). She states: "This [political role young people play in society] should not just be about the effect of power on young people, but also the political power young people wield through their practices, resistance, strategies and challenges" (Skelton, 2010, p. 146-147). Young people are not apathetic bodies (Rose, 1993) in space and place, but have legitimate power over production and conceptualization of space and place (Skelton, 2010; Skelton & Aitken, 2019). Of children specifically, geographer Gill Valentine writes, "Children are not passively molded by unidirectional processes of socialization, but actively contest and rework adult frameworks" (Valentine, 2010, p. 27). Young people are not only intrinsically intertwined within socio-spatial places but hold unique construction and control over space and place (Skelton, 2010; Valentine, 2010).

While youth hold distinct power and agency in relation to the creation of space and place (Skelton, 2010; Valentine, 2010), various forms of engagement and experiences can shape the young person's perception of life around them. Valentine writes, "The social meanings attributed to children's bodies matter because they shape

children's individual and collective experiences of and exclusions from public space and have important implications for children's sense of place in the world" (Valentine, 2010, p. 32). While similar, there are some distinct and subtle differences in the literature between Children's and Youth Geographies. Scholars recognize that young people, not 'children' but not yet 'adult,' sit in a unique relationship to space and place (Valentine, 2019; Wood, 2015). How young people are exposed to different social conditions affects the *sense of place* and belonging that are created and maintained. Young people are framed and understood typically through dominant social narratives (Hall et al., 1999). As youth are seen through the liminal lens, growing and 'becoming adult' (Valentine, 2019), oftentimes they are seen as something to be feared – the teen or young adult through stages of rebellion (Valentine & Skelton, 1998). This age category, as perceived by society, is therefore marginalized, made to be individuals that need to be shaped according to normative standards (Valentine & Skelton, 1998; Valentine, 2019). This condition, while not conclusive for young people, is taken as a point of study in geography to give voice and agency to youth and young people (Jeffrey, 2012). These conditions, coupled with spatial and temporal scales, result in a liminal sense of place by youth (Wood, 2015). Bronwyn Wood states:

Liminality, in this sense, exposes how young people's temporal stage in their life course (age) and status in society renders them neither completely 'child,' nor completely 'adult', in their ability to operate as autonomous political agents or access the full entitlements of adult citizenship (Wood, 2015, p. 12).

The dimension of liminality allows for a complication of youth understanding, but also interrogates the exclusion of youth narratives in interpreting space and place (Wood, 2015, p. 12). Supporting feminist approaches to understanding space and place, youth

liminality obscures false binary approaches to interpreting spatial change and construction (Massey, 1994; Wood, 2015). As youth sit in the liminal space where their sense of belonging (Wood, 2015), engagement with space and place, and the idea of spatial change are constantly developing, they are also re-envisioning space and place to capture an ambiguous and a holistic narrative of the world around them.

As scholars have recognized, place is not simply a static background or setting for everyday life, but a dynamic process that is shaped by and given meaning through people's practices and experiences. This perspective and understanding of sense of place, space, and place as multifaceted through the lens of young people allows this thesis to focus on my participants' dynamic experience across time and through the relationships formed in the Wells Avenue District. Additionally, my participants all ethnically identify as Hispanic-Latino/a and eleven as second-generation Americans (the other four participants did not explicitly share). They define 'second generation American' as someone who is born in the United States to parents who were born in another country and immigrated to the United States. To this definition, they also describe being second generation as growing up with both Hispanic-Latino/a culture *and* American culture. This perspective adds cultural complexity to understanding space and place through the eyes of young people.

Role of Commercial Spaces for Creating a Sense of Place

The cultural and economic character of the Wells Avenue District has undergone several changes in Reno's history. In the 1990's, Wells became home to a growing Hispanic-Latino/a population and the corridor of Wells Avenue became the commercial center of Hispanic-Latino/a culture in the city (Palma & Ocampo, 2021). For example,

the commercial built environment reflects this history and serves as a symbol of cultural identity in place through gathering places where a variety of Hispanic-Latino/a oriented businesses provide the means for the production and reproduction of important cultural traditions. Thus, for my participants, engagement with the commercial landscape of Wells Avenue is an act of place-making which fosters a *sense of place*. For my participants, commercial spaces are among the most meaningful features of the Wells landscape and are the places that root their communal and familial memories of Wells.

Commercial spaces are not simply material sites of capitalist production and consumption. They are also important places of cultural meaning that instill a sense of place for those on the margins, including immigrant communities, communities of color, and young people (Rios & Vasquez, 2012; Steigemann, 2019; Valentine, 2010). Commercial spaces are often sites where unplanned engagement and encounter occur, compared to other places in everyday life (Lofland, 1971). These engagements foster neighborhood identity, culture, community, and a sense of belonging in place (Deener, 2007; Hayden, 1995; Rios & Vasquez, 2012; Steigemann, 2019; Zukin, 2012). For communities on the margins, these commercial spaces are integral sites of identity making, place-making, and power relations (Hayden, 1995; Rios & Vasquez, 2012; Steigemann, 2019). Historian Dolores Hayden discusses the importance of understanding different communities' histories in urban space and the way that these groups have existed and come to understand urban space (Hayden, 1995). Hayden states:

The power of place to nurture social memory- to encompass shared time in the form of shared territory- remains untapped for most working people's neighborhoods in most American cities. The sense of civic identity that shared history can convey is lost or repressed. Even bitter experiences need to be remembered- so as not to diminish their importance (Hayden, 1994, p. 467)

Hayden expresses that within American cities there are shared histories and mutual identities amongst communities. It is important to uncover and narrate these attachments and relationships to the urban space (Hayden, 1994). Sharing the different experiences and histories in the commercial space emphasizes the diverse and marginal perspectives that have long existed and consistently combat hegemonic powers (Hayden, 1995).

Hayden explores how hegemony in American cities has underrepresented and misrepresented working class communities, women, and racial or ethnic groups (Hayden, 1995). Sharon Zukin, urban sociologist, shares how immigrant-owned businesses take steps toward inclusive cultural commercial spaces:

Local shopping streets are simultaneously a site of social, economic, and cultural exchange. Unlike the standardized architectural designs and transnational ownerships of both central shopping streets and suburban malls, they provide a “face” of local social and cultural identity. They do this through the small scale of social interactions; by the rootedness of individually owned shops in local economies; and by the on-going cultural negotiation, on the part of store owners, customers, and habitués, of two cardinal principles of urban life: familiarity and strangeness (Zukin, 2012, p. 282).

Zukin shares that local commercial spaces owned by immigrant communities produce multicultural inclusivity and are paramount to sustaining and recruiting cultural heritage within a commercial setting (Zukin, 2012). Coupled with the histories of local inclusive commercial spaces, many marginal communities utilize commercial settings to create collective identity (Godfrey, 2016). Geographer Brian Godfrey explains how collective identity manifests in commercial space through businesses.

While businesses typically cater to ethnic needs, tastes in food and drink, and entertainment patterns, they also provide higher-order services such as doctors, insurance, and legal services. Signage in a foreign language or dialect illustrates this ethnic transition, as does local street life, social space, and a sense of place. Local institutions of church and state may offer bilingual services and ceremonies

in native languages. Community art and architectural adaptation reflect ethnic themes. Entrepreneurs often project certain regional or national images to attract businesses by local residents, visitors, and even tourists. Community monuments, landmarks, names of streets and public spaces, and other ethnic symbols suggest enhanced group status and political importance. In short, the urban ethnic landscape becomes a source of collective ethnic identity (Godfrey, 2016, p. 10).

This reflects dominant ethnic groups, creating a sense of place and belonging within commercial spaces to serve the needs of the community (Godfrey, 2016; Rios & Vasquez, 2012).

Jesus Lara discusses the importance of commercial businesses and services for the Hispanic-Latino/a community specifically. “In addition to the sociocultural support networks, the establishment of ethnic commercial businesses and services contributes to a sense of pride in an area and plays an important role in the social structure of immigrant communities” (Lara, 2018, p. 52) Here Lara is discussing Latino immigrant communities and emphasizes the importance and vitality that cultural construction of commercial space has on this community (Lara, 2018). Geographer Daniel Arreola also describes how niche marketing, cultural engagement, and redevelopment efforts for Latino communities has long contributed to the growth and establishment of community in American cities (Arreola, 1993/1995/2004/2012). The presence of Latino communities in urban landscapes has long challenged common perceptions of American homogeneity (Arreola, 2004; Godfrey, 2017; Rios & Vasquez, 2012). Ecologist Michael Rios and urban planner Leonardo Vasquez discuss the importance of unity and participation within commercial space in Latin cultures, “For many Latino communities, identity emerges from resistance to dominant institutions and groups with power, but identities are also formed by participation in community life that aims to give voice, gain power, and create

social standing” (Rios & Vasquez, 2012, p. 14). Despite neighborhood change, gentrification, and the enduring impacts of COVID-19, Latino communities uphold resiliency in commercial space through resistance, civic participation, and collectivism (Rios & Vasquez, 2012).

Arreola discusses the forms of community power that ethnic enclaves foster as a unique feature of urban space. Ethnic enclaves are understood as spatial structures or spaces in the city which represent and embody ethnic identities (Godfrey, 1985). Hispanic-Latino/a community can look like ethnic enclaves within the commercial space (Arreola, 2004; Godfrey, 1985/2016). What an ethnic enclave embodies is a community, cultural landscape, and a sense of belonging. Businesses located in Latino enclaves can create a sense of communal identity amongst immigrant communities and communities of color. Features like language accessibility, family community and unity, cultural eateries/foods, and resources and outreach built from the work of Arreola and Godfrey organize the following four ways that commercial spaces can cater to the needs of immigrant communities and communities of color based on participant responses and engagements in the Wells Avenue District. This list is also representative of Latino studies in geography, urban planning, and community development (Arreola, 2004; Godfrey, 2016; Lara, 2018; Rios & Vasquez, 2012).

1. *Language Accessibility*

Arreola states, “Language, for example, is sometimes argued as the glue that holds Hispanic/Latino populations together and that gives them a common bond and unifies them as an ethnic people” (Arreola, 2004, p. 16). There is an interpersonal trust that stems from a similar or same linguistic background (Zentella, 1997). Language plays

a huge role in the ability of people to understand, address, engage, and learn in and through place. Many people are socialized with their language from birth (Zentella, 1997) and language mediates one's relationship to the self, mutual identity with others, and attachment to place (Zhuang, 2019). While language serves as a cultural connection to the community, it is through commercial spaces that language can connect an individual to a place (Zhuang, 2019).

2. *Familiar Community & Unity*

What familiarity with place provides the community is a *sense of place* and home (Altman & Low, 1992). When discovering and analyzing place attachment for children, Irwin Altman and Setha Low proposed that, "A place can be valued precisely because it is so familiar that we do not need to think about it because our sensations have fused into a general sense of comfort and utility" (Altman & Low, 1992, p. 71). For varying cultures, it becomes important to have features which allow for an individual or group to "belong" to a place (Hooks, 2009). While familiarity is built with longer engagement to a place (Steigemann, 2019), what initiates comfort in commercial spaces are cultural anecdotes and the engagement from the proprietor to the customer. Through the commercial space, there is a built sense of belonging, ownership, unity, collectivism, and place attachment that is produced.

3. *Cultural Eateries/Foods*

For Hispanic-Latino/a culture, food is an integral and unique part of social connection, cultural meaning, and life (Weller & Turkon, 2015). Consumption of food can be an act of engaging and producing culture, memories, nostalgia, and communal ties. In Daniel Weller and David Turkon's study on first and second-generation Latinos'

relationship to food, they find that a lack of consumption of ethnic foods is a direct indication of exclusion and disconnection from culture (Weller & Turkon, 2015, p. 66).

Indeed, food as an identity-validating symbol actively connects immigrants and their descendants to their heritage culture. For Latino immigrants in Ithaca consuming heritage food is at once a catalyst for recalling memories and maintaining an emotional connection to distant family, and a basis for social interaction and group solidarity within the broader Latino community (Weller & Turkon, 2015, p. 70).

These businesses, where immigrant individuals were able to engage with cultural foods that reminded them of their connection to family and histories, are places of importance for this Latino community (Weller & Turkon, 2015). Today, there are many cultural restaurants in Wells which connect the community to this commercial space.

4. Resources & Outreach

The commercial landscape is also vital for the provision of goods *and* services for communities, but for immigrant and Hispanic-Latino/a communities, it can be much more difficult to access resources in American urban spaces (Arreola, 2004). A communal sense of place and belonging can rightly be established or broken based on the readily available access to basic needs, including housing and health. Accessibility can look like language, walkability, and affordability (Steigemann, 2019). Wells Avenue serves as an important hub for Hispanic-Latino/a cultural needs and gatherings (Palma & Ocampo, 2021). Local businesses and services specifically serve as important sites for communities on the margin to facilitate collective identity, find a sense of place, and build community power which resist American hegemony (Arreola, 2004; Godfrey, 2016; Hayden, 1995; Rios & Vasquez, 2012; Steigemann, 2019; Zukin, 2012).

Commercial spaces are sites for community engagement and ethnic identity building; they are also places where youth and young people of color can practice and engage their

agency and autonomy (Jeffrey, 2012). Commercial spaces are sites where youth and young people can gather and exercise individual and financial autonomy. As geographers like Aitken, Jeffrey, and Skelton outline, young people are rarely given agency and voice, and through examining the work of marginal identity in the commercial space, this is space where they experience and engage explicitly in decision-making, community making, and ethnic identity (Aitken, 2000; Jeffrey, 2012; Skelton, 2010).

Gentrification and Sense of Place

Wells Avenue is a place of ‘humble beginnings,’ where many immigrants, first and second-generation Americans, and communities of color establish a sense of urban or even national belonging. The existence of neighborhoods concentrated with cultural goods and services for communities, as described above, is vital to that belonging, but Wells is dynamic and changing at the intersection of both local and global (Massey, 2013). This research is thus situated at a time of great change and worry for this community because of social and economic processes, such as gentrification and pandemic-induced changes (Hidalgo, 2021; Palma & Ocampo, 2021). During my walking interviews with my participants, the term ‘gentrification’ came up frequently according to structural and anecdotal change in Wells Avenue. Many of my participants would point out changes in buildings and businesses that, for them, represent the ongoing impacts of gentrification. This form of commercial change *or* development begged an analysis of gentrification. In this chapter, I also discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on urban space as a process that further exacerbated the socioeconomic inequality already manifested through gentrification. I focus primarily in this section on how these processes create forms of social inequality that affect a sense of place and belonging.

Critical political-economic and urban geographers understand the built environment of cities to be a reflection and outcome of the uneven processes of Capitalism (Harvey, 1996; Smith, 2002; Smith, 2010). Marxist geography in the 1980's looked at questions of political economy and urban geography through the lens of gentrification. Geographers Neil Smith and David Harvey are foundational scholars in the work on uneven development in geography and gentrification as its material expression (Harvey, 1996; Smith, 2002; Smith, 2010). Gentrification is, broadly, a process of upper-class capital systems recomposing working-class areas through physical, social, and political reconstruction, displacing working-class communities, and deepening social and economic gaps in classes within the urban landscape (Glass, 1960; Smith, 1987/1996/2002/2010). This process works to displace established communities on the margin and working-class communities in the urban landscape through features like newer housing and new businesses (Smith, 2010). This is an economic and physical displacement of various communities in the urban landscape (Glass, 1960; Smith, 2010). Smith states, "Much as capitalism strives toward the annihilation of space by time, it also strives more and more to produce a differentiated space as a means to its own survival" (Smith, 1982, p. 152). Smith's understanding of gentrification leans heavily on the idea of gentrification as a *process* occurring within the landscape to reshape and annex existing livelihoods and expressions of place.

To recognize gentrification as a process is to recognize its dynamic nature. Like place (Massey, 1994/2013), there is no one universal and fixed experience of gentrification. How gentrification is expressed, interpreted, and experienced varies from place to place. Places shift and change in the context of broader social, political, and

economic processes (Massey, 1994/2013) as broader flows of capital and patterns of investment and disinvestment meet local variation. Urban change dynamics as investigated through the process of gentrification exemplify broader national trends and changes in urban settings (Knaap, 2022). Spaces experiencing gentrification in the U.S. are often socially, economically, and culturally impacted and influenced with many established communities and spaces being displaced or assimilated (Zukin et al., 2009). As, gentrification has primarily been examined as economic growth in place producing need for skilled workers coupled with severe housing shortages within American cities (Wyly, 2021); other causal factors of this phenomena include public policy, technology, racial makeup, family structure, and housing supply (Hwang & Lin, 2016). These factors expand the scope of causes when it comes to interpreting and understanding gentrification across many urban settings.

Outcomes of uneven development, gentrification, and COVID-19 for communities of color look like spatial dislocation and displacement, marginalization of the urban working class, and struggle to build social and political standing (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Recio et al., 2021; Rios & Vasquez, 2012). We can see this distribution of inequality mostly through urban and commercial spaces. The restlessness of production in the urban landscape (Wyly, 1999) generates an intensified cultural divide between planners and communities as well as within communities (Mills, 2007; Rios & Vasquez, 2012). Where communities of color actively work against capital systems to cultivate belonging in the landscape, the ongoing work of capital consumption within the landscape further marginalizes and disadvantages the community (Harvey, 2009; Mills, 2007). This is where the community and scholars demand a more intensive and

interactive approach to developing the urban and commercial landscape for those communities on the margins (Hooks, 2009; Massey, 2013; Rios & Vasquez, 2012). When discussing the way to imagine and incorporate the voices and opinions of the Hispanic-Latino/a community, Rios & Vasquez state,

Rather than framing conceptions of place as a static and bounded territorial community, planners should consider that places are always in the process of *becoming*, and therefore need to respond creatively with respect to their assessment, engagement, and proposals (Rios & Vasquez, 2012, p. 4).

This proposition critiques how we commonly understand the production of place but also encourages Massean thought and Marxist interpretation which discusses how to imagine a more inclusive and abstract place (Harvey, 2010; Massey, 1994/2013).

As geographers suggest, gentrification is dynamic because it is situated in a continually developing place (Harvey, 1996). The fluidity and temporality of gentrification no longer nullifies the existence of the process but exemplifies its impacts and role in other neighborhood processes as well (Knieriem, 2023). The elusiveness of gentrification is not because it itself is nonexistent or contradictory, but because social understanding of place and place processes are continuously changing (Knieriem, 2023). For its diversity of character and expression, Marijn Knieriem describes gentrification as a “moving target,” a term coined by philosopher Ian Hacking (Hacking, 2007; Knieriem, 2023). Knieriem utilizes this idea with dynamic nominalism to support gentrification as an ever-changing process influenced by other dynamic processes (Knieriem, 2023). Knieriem supports that an analysis of external processes and insight into those experiencing forces like gentrification are better capable of speaking to the uneven effects of this phenomenon (Knieriem, 2023). Knieriem states,

Attention should be paid to how terms like gentrification and social mix are used by the people involved in the process (policy makers, project developers, people who are displaced, shop owners, gentrifiers themselves, etc.), how these usages alter the phenomenon and how this interacts with the concept's meanings (Knieriem, 2023, p. 16).

As Knieriem suggests, if an understanding of gentrification is only interpreted through the lens of the phenomenon itself; this process is truly only understood unidirectionally rather than a process to be interrupted, changed, or impacted (Ramírez et al., 2020).

For communities affected by gentrification in all its forms and meanings, the most significant feature is that of physical, economic, social, and cultural displacement and dispossession (Harvey, 1996; Smith, 2010). Gentrification creates and exacerbates inequality in commercial spaces (Smith, 2010). For participants, that came in the form of the closure of some small businesses or the lack of accessibility to resources and services. For participants, the ongoing changes in Wells are twofold and can be attributed both to gentrification and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating inequality. COVID-19 affected all communities through isolation, closure of resource offices, economic precarity, and increased health risks (Bissell, 2021; Lozano-Gracia, 2020; Recio et al., 2021). The pandemic disproportionately impacted communities of color, low-income communities, and young people (Dua et al., 2021; Leyshon, 2023; Recio et al., 2021); it also revealed the more longstanding inequalities existing in these communities long before the pandemic (Lozano-Gracia, 2020) Many participants expressed concern over the dual impacts of ongoing gentrification processes and pandemic-induced changes in Wells. Like uneven development and gentrifying tactics, the pandemic has put the most marginal communities at high health and economic risk and intensified social inequalities (Leyshon, 2023) through uneven distribution of health

resources and support (Grove et al., 2022). So, in this thesis, I consider the pandemic part of a broader, multi-faceted force of neighborhood change in the district that, for many, started with gentrification.

While the global pandemic has settled in intensity, economic and social inequities linger which have collectively changed a sense of security and connection to place in the landscape of daily life (Bissell, 2020; Leyshon, 2023); geographers call for research on the everyday experiences of place. Much of the scholarship on gentrification in geography and throughout the social sciences understands gentrification through a binary of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ or gentrifiers and those experiencing gentrification (Doucet, 2009). While these dominant narratives lay out a dichotomous perspective on the process, some geographers are rethinking these ‘traditional’ perceptions by focusing on the lived experiences of individuals. What I found through my participants is that there is a much more nuanced understanding and experience of the process of gentrification. Geographer and urban planner Brian Doucet explores gentrification through the lens of the individual experiences of such a process (Doucet, 2009), which undermines the gentrified/gentrifier binary. Doucet proposes that gentrification is more nuanced and complex through the individual perspective (Doucet, 2009). Doucet argues, “by evaluating the sentiments and opinions of those who were neither gentrifiers nor displacees, it becomes evident that gentrification is more nuanced, particularly from the perspectives of those who have lived through it” (Doucet, 2009, p. 313). The perspective of individuals experiencing or understanding gentrification is far more complex than understanding the effects of gentrification solely as a marginalizing process.

Commercial spaces are experiencing a homogenization of place and business leading to dispossession, affecting communities of color the most (Rios & Vasquez, 2012). Simultaneously, however, experiences of dispossession and displacement are being complicated through youth and young people geographies (Butcher & Dickens, 2016). Youth are uniquely positioned in the gentrification space literally and figuratively. In my research, participants expressed both critical and welcoming views of the changes along Wells. Melissa Butcher and Luke Dickens' research examines youth responses to gentrification. Specifically, they look at the effects of spatial dislocation and affective displacement, a general sense of not belonging in place, on young people in public space. They write of youth: "Rather than straightforward antagonism, there is inconsistency and contradiction in their responses to urban change, with both gains and losses in their calculations of the impact of gentrification" (Butcher & Dickens, 2016, p. 812). In their work, young people were able to find points of connection to changing commercial and residential spaces alongside an ongoing sense of spatial dislocation. Both can exist simultaneously.

Thus, gentrification must be understood as a dynamic process in place (Knieriem, 2023; Massey, 2013), constantly changing and being reinterpreted and reassessed by those experiencing and engaging with gentrifying spaces (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Doucet, 2009). A combination of criticism and gains is more accurate in representing the experiences of gentrification and imagining landscapes for the future. As a result of this relatively recent body of literature, a discussion on the agency of young people in interpreting and critiquing traditional narratives for the cultural, urban, and commercial spaces is imperative.

Bringing an Intersectional Lens to the Gentrification Literature: Interpretations and Experiences of Space and Place by Youth

This section concludes the chapter by bringing work in Youth Geographies together with contemporary critiques of gentrification in urban geography. Through the concepts of temporality, intergeneration, multiculturalism, and pluralism, I explain how and why young people complicate traditional narratives of place especially in relation to processes of neighborhood change like gentrification. Because young people sit developmentally and socially in a transitional space, their perspective on place also sits in the transition wherein they are redefining traditional categories through which place is given meaning. This is why they offer a unique and important perspective on place and gentrification.

Intersectionality is a framework for understanding how identities, such as class, age, and race, intersect and inform different experiences of advantage and disadvantage (Crenshaw, 1989). Civil rights advocate and intersectional feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw first coined the term intersectionality to describe discrimination, racism, and sexism faced by Black women (Crenshaw, 1989). Geographers, Maria Rodó-de-Zárate and Mireia Baylina express that “‘Intersectionality’ was mainly developed to show how race and gender couldn’t be analysed as being neither mutually exclusive nor separate from each other, contributing to a more complex and dynamic understanding of social relations and power structures” (Rodó-de-Zárate & Baylina, 2018, p. 548).

Intersectionality reveals the layers of inequalities felt by different communities in various places (Hopkins, 2019; Rodó-de-Zárate & Baylina, 2018). By focusing on Hispanic/Latino-a youth, his research studies the experience of gentrification through the

lens of youth of color, carving out a space of intellectual inquiry for the ‘other’ at the intersectionality of race/ethnicity, age, class, and immigration (Hopkins, 2010; Hopkins, 2019; Pain et al., 2010). Specifically, this work shows how second and third generation Hispanic-Latino/as are conceptually and materially changing the boundaries for community through engagements with material space. This study does not just focus on Hispanic-Latinos/as *or* young people, but both. Through youth intersectionality, the multiplicity of places and positions through race and age that exist, reveal various links to understanding space and place by young people (Rodó-de-Zárate, 2017). Below, I highlight some of the themes that are possible by bringing an intersectional lens focused on youth of color to the study of gentrification and sense of place.

1. Temporality in the Youth Perspective

Geographers write that young people sit at the juncture of past and future (Wood, 2015). Youth and young adults are seen as ‘becoming adult(s)’ and thus occupy a liminal state of being (Wood, 2015), with liminal meaning an ‘in-between’ or ‘transitional’ phase of life (Wood, 2015). Because of this liminal state, youth and young people are often excluded as conceptual creators and interpreters of space and place (Skelton, 2016; Wood, 2015). Wood writes, “Liminality offers a conceptual lens of which to interrogate the ambiguities and complexities to youth exclusion” (Wood, 2015, p. 19). Applying liminality to understand the youth and young adult perspective of space and place engages temporal, experiential, and generational narratives (Andres & Wyn, 2010) and unveils a nuanced perception of space and place (Wood, 2015). Many of my participants understand the Wells commercial space through their memories, families, and visions for the space. This temporal perspective, which my participants bring up, begs a deeper

understanding of how young adults understand dynamic spaces and places today *through* the temporal and liminal lens (Andres & Wyn, 2010; Hamilton-Mckenna & Rogers, 2021; Valentine, 2019; Wood, 2015).

1. Intergenerational Youth Experience

Many of my participants expressed their understanding of the Wells Avenue space through their family and communal networks. Geographers Robert Vanderbeck and Gill Valentine discuss how social and political trends ignite distinctive attitudes in different generations; Valentine suggests that youth understand contemporary political and social problems as generational inequalities which impacts themselves, their families, and different generations (Valentine, 2019; Vanderbeck, 2007). Vanderbeck argues for a less compartmentalized approach to examining issues of geographical concern, utilizing analysis of young people and adults within and between societies (Vanderbeck, 2007; Diprose et al., 2019). Vanderbeck shares, “Intergenerational relationships can thus be understood both within the context of kinship systems and wider generational orderings, and these understandings intersect within the context of individual biographies” (Vanderbeck, 2007, p. 205). The understanding and identity of young people is not solely influenced by their unique position in history and place (temporal) but proposes that young people have kinship systems which produce an intergenerational understanding of space and place (Valentine, 2019; Vanderbeck, 2007; Wyn & Woodman, 2007). As children and young adults today are experiencing a dynamic shift in culture, policy, and environment, engaging in the perspectives and perceptions that young people have revealed an unseen and often hidden perspective of temporal socio-spatial interpretation, which embodies a multitude of understandings. This generational perspective brings

consciousness to how youth and young people are situated in various generations, politics, and social structures (Valentine, 2019). This type of analysis recognizes the diversity of place and social relations in place, but also emphasizes the complexity of how youth and young adults engage in place.

2. *Youth Valuing Multiculturalism*

Through the young person we see a movement from the necessity for a solely “adult” or “young person” space, to an embodiment of both and the promotion of mixed-use spaces which allow all to belong. Informed by the youth narrative, place and space are no longer binary and homogenous, but composite and varying in experience and ideals. Throughout my own data collection, participants expressed the desire for Wells Avenue to serve many cultures, generations, and communities. Intergenerational work discusses youth spaces encompassing different generations and thus the youth perception of place encompassing generational narratives; queer geographies and multiculturalism literature have explored the role between space and place and the production of sexuality, identities, communities, subcultures, subjectivities, and practices for the young person (Johnston, 2016). It has become important for this work to explore queer geographies and multiculturalism because participants provide a nuanced and complex perspective of space and place which embodies many cultures and identities. Sociologist, Anita Harris, explores the role of multiculturalism in the everyday life and spaces of the young person. Harris states:

Multiculturalism is a dynamic, lived field of action within which social actors both construct and deconstruct ideas of cultural difference, national belonging, and place-making. Such a perspective moves beyond the notions of multiculturalism as an ideology or a policy, and beyond the focus on ‘ethnic’ groups or individuals and their capacity to adapt. Instead it addresses places and

practices of mix, encounter, conflict, negotiations, and recognition of – the lived practice of cultural diversity (Harris, 2009, p. 188).

Examining multiculturalism through the youth engagement with space and place complicates how to imagine the future of space and what forms of identities can belong (Harris, 2009).

Young people serve as symbols of hope for culturally diverse spaces just through their everyday engagements (Butcher & Harris, 2010). Geographers Melissa Butcher and Harris state:

Young people from different backgrounds routinely encounter one another in their everyday lives and negotiate ways of living together, sharing urban and suburban space. Schools, streets, shopping malls, public transport, clubs, parks, beaches, sports, and music venues are all significant, if ordinary, sites where young people engage routinely in intercultural mixing (Butcher & Harris, 2010, p. 450).

Young people value multicultural spaces, where differing social networks, mixed range of generations, and various identities can exist (Harris, 2009; Valentine & Skelton, 2003).

Taking into consideration the complexities of queer geography, scholars imagine the multiplicity that exists for the young person when it comes to temporal experiences, intergenerational connections, identity making, and multicultural engagement.

Understanding space and place is an active process for the young person and involves varying perspectives and temporalities. This becomes a paramount piece to imagining the young adult or youth perspective ability to imagine the future of space and place (Hamilton-Mckenna & Rogers, 2021).

3. *Paradox in Place*

The young person serves as a lens into present and past culture in addition to community, but also envisions an imagined future (Hamilton-Mckenna & Rogers, 2021).

Geographers Melissa Butcher and Luke Dickens emphasize the *complexity* and *paradox* that exists between the young person's perspective and the commonly understood antagonistic character of gentrification. Wells Avenue is a space which is considered gentrifying by many of my participants, but many of them expressed paradoxical emotions to the process's effects. While many understand the process to displace the established community, they simultaneously enjoy new businesses and safety features because of the process. The work of Butcher & Dickens is an insight as to why. This begins with understanding how young people can understand space and place. They state, "Young people appear to have the capacity to reimagine their relationship with the complex space they have grown up in and call home" (Butcher & Dickens, 2016, p. 801). Butcher and Dickens research how young people interpret and experience neighborhood gentrification. They were affected in the sense that they experienced spatial dislocation and affective displacement, but they also enjoyed some of the outcomes of gentrification. What Butcher and Dickens found is a nuanced view of gentrification and urban change. In their study, there were "gains" and "losses" to the young people experiencing gentrification. The "gains" were described as "security, accessing new resources and generating practices that reflected transforming subjectivities" (801), whereas "losses" were described as "stress factors that generated insecurity, including the threat of spatial dislocation (eviction or homelessness) and a diminishing sense of belonging through affective displacement" (Butcher & Dickens, 2016, p. 801). How young people interpret this form of change (gentrification) is thus multifaceted and does not have to be either good or bad but can encompass both "gains" and "losses" (Butcher & Dickens, 2016).

This echoes what Skelton-Aitken and Massey mention about how youth bring complexity and nuance to a reimagining of traditional narratives (Massey, 2013; Skelton & Aitken, 2019). Where feminist theory has deconstructed fixed positions, experiences, and interpretations of space and place, youth geographies exemplify the complexities of space and place (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Butcher & Harris, 2010; Vanderbeck, 2007; Wood, 2015).

By no means are these analyses of youth and young adult literature *whole* in the sense that it captures a holistic narrative and all perceptions of young people. Many pieces of this analysis do not represent how space, place, and public space is understood by young communities of color. Where most work within interethnic spaces with a culturally diverse group of people is understood through the adult narrative (Butcher & Dickens, 2016), there is a disparity in how youth or young adult communities of color understand or imagine dynamic, public, and commercial spaces. My research combines the marginal narrative of youth and young people with those that identify with Hispanic-Latino/a ethnicities to captures how these communities understand dynamic commercial spaces like Wells Avenue. Furthermore, it captures how Hispanic-Latino/a young adults interpret, experience, and imagine a culturally significant commercial space.

Conclusion

While this research is focused on commercial spaces as sites of change, they are also important spaces of memory and connection for my participants. Sense of place geographies are explored to understand how commercial spaces can serve as constructs of individual connection to place (Steigemann, 2019) and how young people facilitate a sense of place in commercial spaces. Youth geographies also emphasize how experience,

perception, and agentic power of the young person is done in space and place. Youth are not just passive bodies of geographic processes, but contentious subjects which complicate and pluralize interpretations and experiences of space and place (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Skelton, 2010; Valentine, 2019; Wood, 2015). This literature review analyzes the youth and young adult perspective to comprehend how space and place processes in commercial landscapes are understood by young people. As this research is focused on Hispanic-Latino/a interpretations and experiences of commercial space, I bring in focuses of immigrant, Hispanic-Latino/a, and youth of color perspectives (Arreola, 2004; Weller & Turkon, 2015; Zukin, 2012). Where an intersectional lenses of space and place are explored through race, class, and age (Crenshaw, 1989; Rodó-de-Zárate & Baylina, 2018). Finally, I capture work within urban geography to understand gentrification as a dynamic process (Knieriem, 2023; Smith, 2010). As my participants name gentrification to be occurring in Wells Avenue, this is an important feature to explore how youth and young people identify and respond to urban processes. Through the work of Doucet (Doucet, 2009) along with Butcher and Dickens (Butcher & Dickens, 2016), I analyze the critique of gentrification literature as binary and unidirectional. Both scholars utilize the lens of youth and young people to capture the complexities and nuances to gentrification (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Doucet, 2009). The method utilized in this study involves interactive perceptions, imaginaries of space and place, and a photo-activity to explore the memory of place as remembered by participants.

Chapter 3

Background and Methodology

Research question formulated from commercial placemaking and youth geography

literature: *How do Hispanic-Latino/a young adults facilitate social connection, build mutual identity, and cultivate a sense of place through engagement with Latino commercial spaces on Wells Avenue in Reno, Nevada?*

Wells Avenue Commercial Corridor

The Wells Avenue Commercial District is one of the oldest neighborhoods in Reno, rich in public art and historical buildings. Wells has historically been an area rich in diversity and multiculturalism; this area has been home to many ethnic groups over the last century, including the Northern Paiute, Martis people, Italian, Irish, and Hispanic communities (Palma & Ocampo, 2021). In the early 1910's to the 1950's, Wells hosted primarily Basque, Italian, and Irish communities (Cox, 2012; Palma & Ocampo, 2021). This was around the same time that Wells became a prominent commercial District (Palma & Ocampo, 2021). Later in the 1960s and 1970's many residents in the Wells Avenue district, primarily White populations, moved to suburban neighborhoods (Schuster, 2010). In the 1990's and 2000's, there was a growth in Hispanic-Latino/a communities and businesses within the Wells Avenue area (Berry, 2004).

In the 1910's, construction began on the Lincoln highway and a trolley service that connected Reno and Sparks (Barber, 2022; Cervasco & Honig-Bear, 2014). These corridors brought traffic through the city and created a need for goods and services. In the 1930s, the Alameda-Wells Avenue Bridge was built to connect Wells Avenue with Fourth Street. The Lincoln Highway and the Alameda Bridge provided direct access to

the Wells Avenue District which increased the amount of commercial activity and businesses (Barber, 2022; Cox, 2012). What was once a predominantly residential area is becoming a busy commercial district. The commercial demand, transportation accessibility, and population increase drove growth (Ahmad, 2018; Baumer, 2022; Rush, 2021; Sanchez & Snyder, 2022). Beginning in the 1990's, an influx of Hispanic-Latino/a populations from Mexico and Central America moved into the neighborhood (Berry, 2004, p. 225). As the Wells Avenue area was rezoned for more high-density infill (Schuster, 2010) many neighborhoods, housing, and rentals were abandoned by the suburban sprawl (Schuster, 2010). The arrival of Hispanic-Latino/a families supported the continued growth of a mixed residential and business area, but also produced businesses that catered to the Hispanic-Latino/a community (Berry, 2004, p. 231). As the population began to develop in Reno, many Latino communities began to build "enclaves" in the Wells district (Lopez, 2016; Berry, 2004, p. 225). Today, residents and the Wells Avenue Merchants Association have worked toward making this commercial district a site of historic preservation and conservation, intending to prevent the mismanagement of place and cultural assimilation (Majewski, 2015). The conservation and preservation put into place within Wells Avenue allowed for preservation of historic buildings and sites, but also allowed for new development in the commercial areas (Majewski, 2015).

Neighborhood changes in Wells of late are informed by trends at the State level. The state of Nevada leads the nation in population growth, primarily in urban areas (Sanchez, 2021), and an influx of new residents paired with limited housing supply has driven up the cost of many commercial and residential properties in Reno, Nevada,

notably in the Wells Avenue commercial district (Ahmad, 2018). In the past decade, Reno alone experienced a 15% increase in population (Metz, 2021). This growth includes a sizable number of new Hispanic-Latino/a residents in Washoe County alone; there has been a 30% increase in the Hispanic-Latino/a population over the last decade (Sanchez & Snyder, 2022). As of 2015, there is 42% Hispanic-Latino/a occupancy in the Wells Avenue Commercial District (Lopez, 2015). This community is attracted to Reno for multiple reasons, including 1) the abundance of jobs that meet desired skill and sector of work desired by the community (Tuman et al., 2013), 2) the unsustainable costs of living in the bordering state of California (Naskar, 2018), and 3) a large and growing consumer market for Hispanic-Latino/a needs (“The Hispanic Factor”, 2013). Since the 1990’s, the Wells Avenue district has been a site of economic investment and structural change where Hispanic-Latino/a communities have built a thriving economic district (Corona, 2021). Today the Wells Avenue commercial space is characterized by a strong residential and commercial Hispanic-Latino/a presence, but there is concern, as this thesis explores, that current socio-economic processes and trends are undermining the health of the community in Wells. This includes effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hidalgo, 2021), urban development (Recio et al., 2021), migration (Tuman et al., 2013), investment/disinvestment, and gentrification (Palma & Ocampo, 2021). This historic district has experienced many iterations of change through preservation, conservation, and now commercial revitalization efforts (Palma & Ocampo, 2021). Today, the Wells Avenue Merchants and Property Owners Association work to develop the commercial space in hopes to reinforce the economic activity.

Since 1969, downtown Reno, adjacent to Wells, has experienced iterations of change and development (Colborne, 2020). The 1969 *Reno Downtown Development Plan* foresaw investment in downtown inhabitants by providing better access to transportation, housing improvements, and the removal of the train station in downtown (Colborne, 2020). Downtown was deemed in need of development because many were concerned it would become ‘lifeless’ or a ‘slum’ (Colborne, 2021). This plan ultimately did not accomplish all that it set out to do (Colborne, 2002), but it started a series of urban renewal efforts and plans for downtown Reno that would extend into the 21st century (Baumer, 2022; Hidalgo, 2018). In 2016, one of the biggest projects in Reno’s history was initiated by the Don J Clark Group and proposed a 1.2 billion dollars investment in high-rise hotels, condominiums, and mixed-use apartments with retail, central park, workforce, affordable mixed housing, etc. (Higdon, 2017). A project for West 2nd Street was proposed to the city by the group in 2016, and since then the project was delayed, never placed on the city agenda again (Higdon, 2017). Following, a one-billion-dollar proposal by Jacobs Entertainment has since become the major force for change in downtown Reno since 2017 (Higdon, 2017). Jacobs Entertainment has invested in and acquired numerous parcels in downtown Reno in hopes of creating a gaming and entertainment experience to revitalize downtown (Hidalgo, 2022; Sabo, 2022).

This type of urban redevelopment is slowly making its way into all adjacent neighborhoods like Midtown and commercial spaces like Wells Avenue (Palma & Ocampo, 2021). There was a massive Virginia Street project which began in 2020 that was intended to make Midtown more accessible and friendly for businesses (Ball, 2021). While these major investments in downtown Reno and Midtown have worked to

moderately revitalize a disinvested commercial space, many argue that they are making Reno less accessible to low-income communities and are a source of gentrification (Rush, 2021). While these commercial spaces have become safer and more “upkept,” new conversations around inflating rental prices, houseless community displacement, and historical/established businesses being removed take the forefront of concerns in Midtown and adjacent neighborhoods (Hidalgo, 2021).

The redevelopment of the downtown and Midtown areas of Reno has caused a ripple into the Wells Avenue and Plumb spaces as well. This is exemplified through the Business Improvement District (BID) agenda which will include the development of Wells Avenue (City of Reno, 2023). This project is said to:

Stabilize downtown streets by improving safety, addressing homelessness, enhancing cleanliness, and activating public spaces. In addition, it will help foster additional activity for existing businesses, attract new investment and businesses to downtown and act as a champion by aligning existing groups to speak with a single unified voice on behalf of downtown (City of Reno, 2023).

Many businesses and community members along Wells suggest that the surrounding development is and will be a force for gentrification (Palma & Ocampo, 2021), but many also suggest that this development has become a positive adjustment to this commercial space. In Wells Avenue there has been a loss of businesses due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Wright, 2020), and an increase of newer businesses in the commercial area (Hidalgo, 2023; Palma & Ocampo, 2021). Developments like the Reno Public Market at the South end of Wells Avenue and its adjacent street, Plumb, are changing the face of Wells businesses and small local businesses (Hidalgo, 2023; Wright, 2020).

Wells Avenue is an important commercial space for Hispanic-Latino/a business and engagement. However, what was once a district seen predominantly as a working-

class Latino community is transforming into a White-dominated commercial space (Palma & Ocampo, 2021). The economic growth and development observed in the Reno core is uneven and there is widespread sentiment, as demonstrated by my participants, that the negative outcomes disproportionately affect Latino-owned businesses and communities. For my participants, Wells is a place full of family and community memories unique to the Latino culture as well as the site of an urban vision, not exclusive but also not entirely encompassing, of this culture. The new space simultaneously woos young people through things like tattoo parlors, coffee shops, etc. Young Hispanic-Latinos/as offer a unique perspective on these changes, having a toe in all of it. How do young Hispanic-Latinos/as experience, negotiate, and imagine then, this commercial place?

These urban change dynamics going on within Wells Avenue are not unique just to this neighborhood and its' adjacent counterparts. This "re-investment" in the central part of the city affects broader changes within other parts of Reno-Sparks as well. Where affordable housing is further marginalized and now suburban neighborhoods have become gathering spaces for similar communities, like Hispanic-Latinos/as because of housing prices and affordability dynamics in the inner city (Hidalgo, 2021; Johnson, 2022). Communities are moving out of central city spaces to access safer neighborhoods, affordable housing, and more access to various resources (Brueckner & Rosenthal, 2009; Lees & Ley, 2008). While this study of Wells Avenue focuses on experiences of over time in a particular place, what is happening in Wells Avenue is not disconnected to other parts of the city as well as different places and cities across the country (Richardson et al.,

2019). Other communities both in Reno-Sparks and nationally are being established at the edges of cities due to effects of inner-city developments (Hwang, 2016).

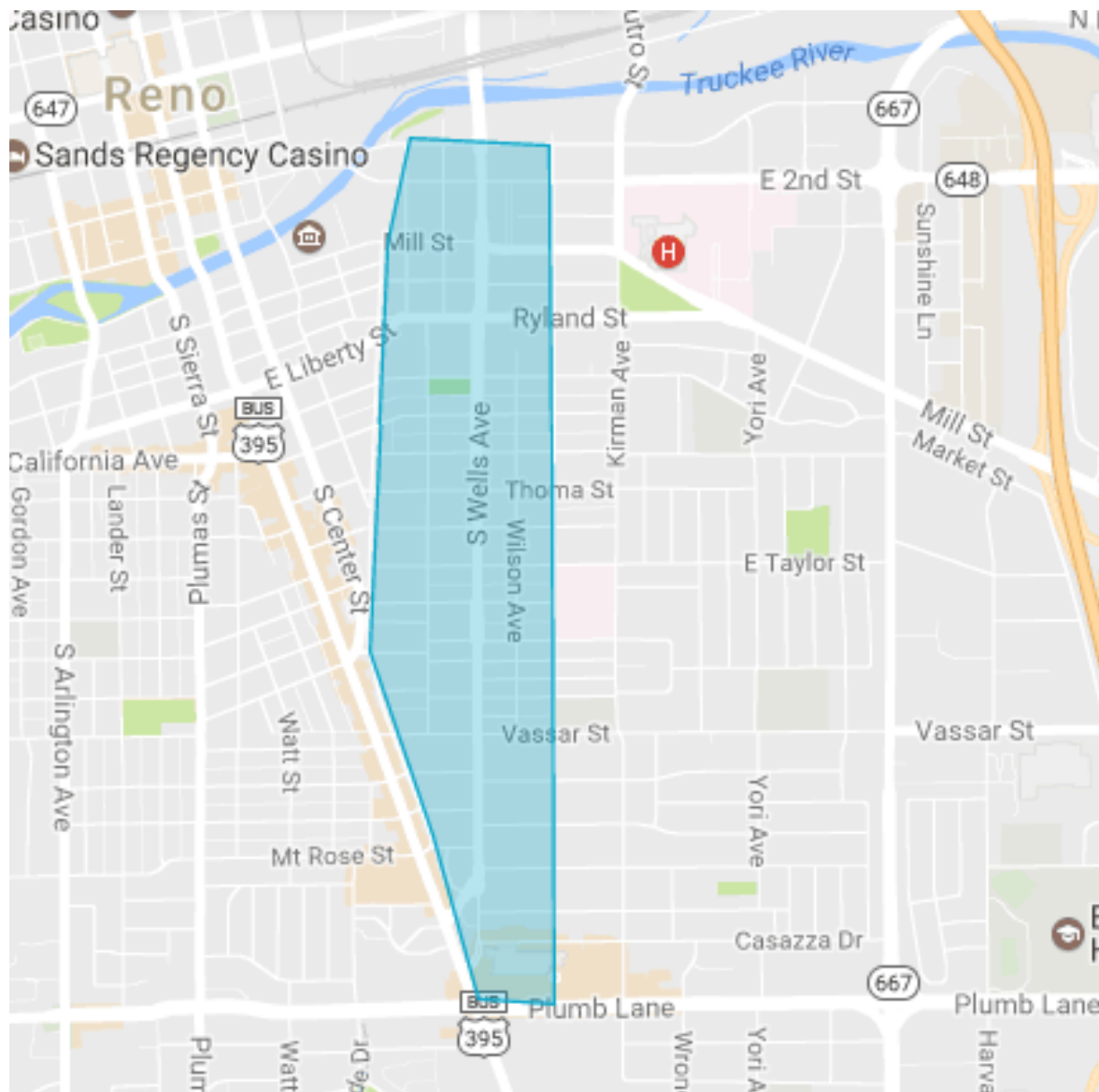


Figure 1. Boundaries of the Wells Avenue District (Google, 2023)

Note: This figure demonstrates the constructed boundaries of the Wells Avenue District depicted by the Wells Avenue Merchants Association using Google Maps. Google Maps representation was used to visualize what boundaries are used when community members search Wells Avenue. The District extends north-south from Kuenzli Street to Plumb Lane. The major commercial corridor is Wells Avenue. There are varying perceptions of

what is considered the Wells Avenue district/neighborhood. For information about how the boundaries of the Wells neighborhood are perceived by residents, see Natasha Majewski's thesis (2015). She shows how perceived boundaries can vary based on social connection, diversity, and historical use (Majewski, 2015).

Participants

Before this study began approval through IRB at the University of Nevada, Reno was established. This study involved a total of 13 participants. The proposal identified 12-15 participants as a sufficient number to provide a variation of information and establish patterns across many perspectives. Participants were recruited who self-identified as Hispanic-Latino/a, were between the ages of 18-28, and held a historic relationship to the Wells commercial district. The terms 'Hispanic' and 'Latino/a' were terms used by the participants, often interchangeably. Participants referred to 'Hispanic' to describe the general community, whereas the term 'Latino/a' was used to describe the identity of self and family. Initially this project anticipated recruiting from ages 18-25, but some participants exceeded this age range as they considered themselves young adults who had a prior connection to the Wells Avenue area. The transition from youth to adulthood can also vary culturally; where many Hispanic-Latino/a individuals vary in age when deciding to leave (if they decide) their family homes (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Participants were self-appointed through a snowball method of recruitment. I began recruitment through an initial contact who introduced me to subsequent contacts/participants where participants were told that they would be participating in both a walking interview and interactive photo activity. Participants were provided a \$30 Visa gift card following the completion of the interview in appreciation for their participation. I chose to focus on young adults aged 18-28 for several reasons. The criteria for

recruitment were based on research guidelines and the supporting literature around the agency and production of space through the lens of young people (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Hamilton-Mckenna & Rogers, 2021; Skelton-Aitken, 2016; Vanderbeck, 2007; Wood, 2015). This age range is experiencing and exploring autonomy, while still being attached to families, with many living at home. It is an age range that is actively carving out their own spaces of leisure to connect and build relationships of support with friends.

Regarding geographic origin (Table 1), all but two participants were born and raised in the Reno-Sparks area. I initially set out to recruit primarily individuals who had a long-term relationship with Wells but was introduced to some newer residents which gave perspective and insight into ‘new eyes’ on Wells. These participants grew up in Reno, South Reno, North Reno, or Sparks. Other participants who are not from Reno-Sparks grew up in Las Vegas, Nevada, the Bay Area of California, or Southern California. Many participants also grew up traveling to their families' place of origin in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and California (Table 1). This diversity in geography informed their engagement and identity in relation to Wells Avenue and how the participants recognize and value the space. For example, participants would reference cities and towns in their family’s place of origin or their own place of origin as models for Wells. Many found similarity in the Hispanic-Latino/a community, walkable commercial space, and a sense of transnational familiarity within Wells. These experiences speak to the abstract and complex understanding of place by young people through their varied backgrounds and exposure to many places (Arreola, 2004; Hamilton-Mckenna & Rogers, 2021; Massey, 2013).

Between the 13 participants, their families' geographical backgrounds captured four different countries (Table 1). Immigrant generation was also of importance to participants' experiences of place. Many of the participants identified that they were the second or third generation to be born in the United States after their parents had moved from other countries. My participants consider themselves second or third generation Americans, while their parents originate from a range of Latin American countries and cities or U.S. states and cities. Pew Hispanic Center states, "First-generation Latinos were born outside the United States or on the island of Puerto Rico ... Second-generation Latinos were born in the United States to immigrant parents ... Third- or higher-generation Latinos were born in the United States to U.S.-born parents" (Pew Hispanic Center, 2004). While traditional ideas on what makes an individual "American" or a "citizen" are robustly discussed in the literature (De Genova & Ramos-Zaya, 2003), my participants expressed that their families and themselves were both American and Hispanic-Latino/a, feeling that they sit at the crossroads of two different cultures and values. A report from the Pew Hispanic Center, states "For this particular ethnic group [Hispanic-Latino/a], it is also a time [ages 18-25] when they navigate the intricate, often porous borders between the two cultures they inhabit—American and Latin American" (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Both cultures are embraced by my participants.

| Name | Second or Third Generation Hispanic-Latino/a | Self-Identified Pronouns | Age | Parent Place of Origin | Participant Primary Place of Origin | Time in Reno-Sparks |
|-----------|--|--------------------------|-----|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Maria | Second Gen | She/Her | 25 | Mexico | Surrounding Wells neighborhood | Since birth |
| James | Second Gen | He/Him | 23 | Bay Area/Caughlin Ranch | Bay Area/South Reno | Since a young child |
| Alicia | N/A | She/Her | 28 | Sparks, NV | Neil Road | Since birth |
| Tony | Second Gen | He/Him | 21 | Las Vegas/El Salvador | Las Vegas | Moved to area in the last 3 years |
| Nayeli | Second Gen | She/Her | 24 | Mexico | Smithridge/Neil Road | Since birth |
| Daniela | Second Gen | She/Her | 28 | Mexico City, Mexico | South Reno | Since birth |
| Cristiano | Second Gen | He/Him | 24 | Mexico/ El Salvador/ Guatemala | Wells/Oddie Blvd | Since birth |
| Erika | Second Gen | She/Her | 20 | Yucatan, Mexico | Las Vegas | Moved to area in the last 3 years |
| Julie | Second Gen | She/Her | 21 | Mexico/ Southern California | Southern California/Reno | Since a young child |
| Michael | Second Gen | He/Him | 26 | El Salvador/ Guatemala | North Stead | Since birth |
| Margaret | Second Gen | N/A | 25 | Jalisco, Mexico | Sun Valley | Since a young child |
| Kate | Third Gen | She/Her/ Hers | 23 | Mexico/Los Angeles, CA | Lemmon Valley | Since birth |
| Edith | N/A | She/Her/ Hers | 24 | California | Surrounding Wells neighborhood | Since birth |

Table 1. Interview Participants: Participant names, indicated by self-chosen pseudonyms, were chosen by the interviewees. Second or third generation Hispanic-Latino/a is defined above by (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Also, the parent's

geographical background represents the places where participants stated their parents grew up in or engaged with during their lifetimes. The participant's geographical background represents the places where the participant grew up. The participant's time in Reno-Sparks represents the length of time in the Reno and Sparks area.

Research Design

This study employed a visual and qualitative methodology that involved walking interviews and an associated photo activity. This interactive qualitative design was deemed useful for understanding how place is experienced and perceived in real time and space (Macpherson, 2016). A walking interview is a form of mobile participatory research practice used in qualitative research to assist in the capture of data that is being created, experienced, and imagined through direct landscape engagement (Moles, 2008). Walking or mobile practices in data collection embrace the 'lived environment' (Lefebvre, 1991) through active engagement and remembered experiences (Macpherson, 2016). Macpherson writes,

Mobile approaches to landscape research reveal the multiple and dynamic ways in which landscapes come into being, are experienced, valued, imagined, and reassembled by different people at different times in different ways through varied habits, practices and technologies (Macpherson, 2016).

Walking techniques to gather place-based data have also been coupled with visual methods to represent how individuals relate to and understand space (O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010). Photography and video are used in studies to help the researcher and participant visualize the values, perceptions, and memories that an individual associates with place and landscape (Pink, 2007).

Data Collection

This research employed a multi-method qualitative approach to understanding the experience of Latino-commercial placemaking among Hispanic-Latino/a-identifying

young adults in the Wells Avenue district. These methods included: 13 semi-structured walking interviews, a form of interviewing that allows participants to engage with the Wells Avenue commercial space through embodied experiences (Macpherson, 2016; Riley & Holton, 2016), coupled with a photo activity in which participants were asked to take photos of places of personal significance along Wells Avenue. I also took notes by hand following the interviews about my observations of key themes or moments. Although the research design was completed in May 2022, official data collection did not begin in this commercial space until November 2022.

The semi-structured walking interviews were conducted from November 2022 to March 2023. Participants were asked to meet by Reno Coffee Company along Wells Avenue for an interactive walking interview (the place of the meeting was based on the comfortability of participants). These walking interviews were semi-structured in nature, meaning a prepared questionnaire was utilized to begin the conversation with room for additional questions or discussions based on participant responses (See Appendix A). The walking interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes. Interview questions were designed to understand the participants' experiences in place, memories in place, and perceptions of development and change in place. Participants were also asked to take photos during walking interviews of meaningful places in their own experiences and opinions. They were asked to elaborate in the interview as to why these places were meaningful to them.

Interview data was collected using my Face ID-protected iPhone and a professional-grade clip microphone/lightning adapter. Participants were provided with a lapel microphone to ensure the quality of sound throughout the interview. All recorded data following the interview went into a secure Nevada Box folder and was removed

from my iPhone. The recordings were then transferred to an online Otter.ai transcription service. These transcripts were then manually edited on the Otter.ai platform. Participants were all made anonymous through the manual edits. These edited transcripts were then used for the analysis process.

1. Semi-structured walking interviews

Initial questions were prepared as a starting point (Appendix A), followed by supplemental questions guided by the participants' responses. The questions asked were to elicit information from the research question and unveil proposed themes throughout the interview through the responses. The semi-structured nature of the interview was to allow a fluid and natural conversation about the participants' experiences and perceptions of place. The walking interview was semi-structured in questions but also in route. The participant had control over the route walked during the interview, but the interviews all began at Reno Coffee Company. This allowed for the participant to guide based on spaces/places of importance for everyone with an emphasis on commercial spaces. All walking interviews occurred along Wells Avenue extending from North to South, from Roberts St to Colorado River Blvd, and West to East, Wells Avenue to Locust St (Figure 2) (Appendix B). While there were boundaries created for the Wells Avenue commercial district (Figure 1), the participants were guided by their perceptions of the commercial space.

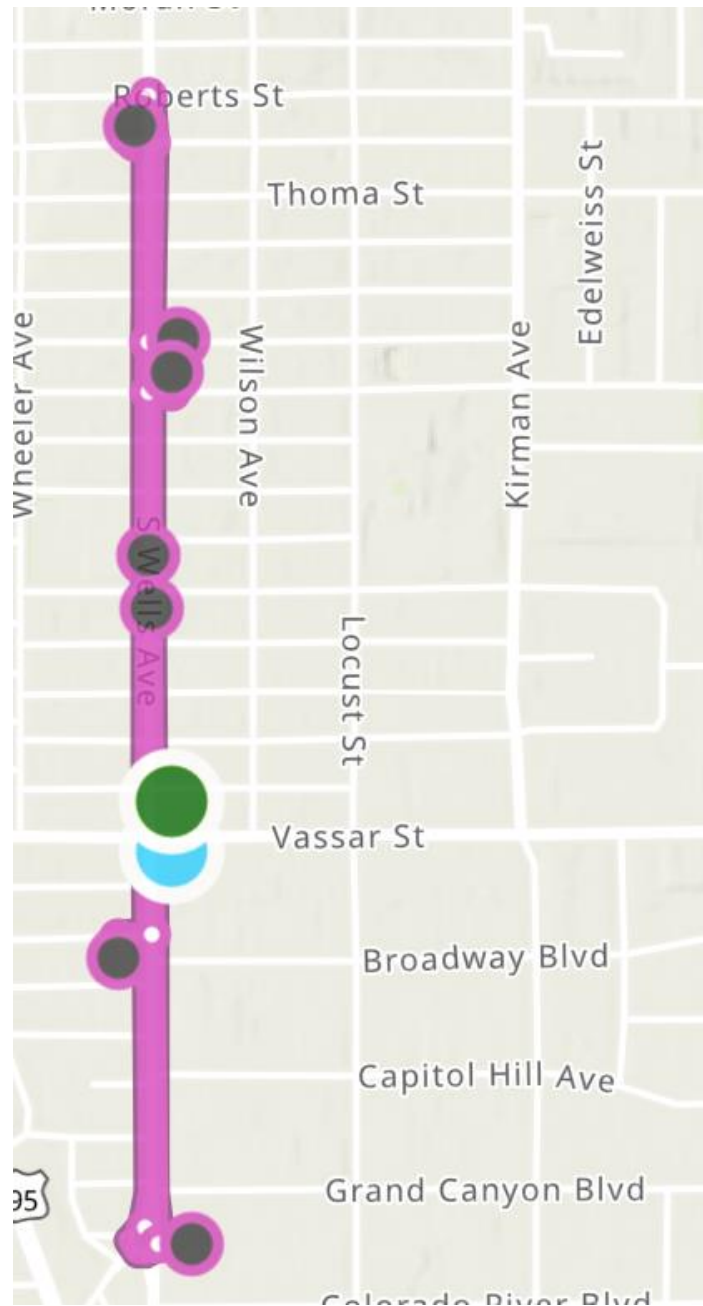


Figure 2. Walking Interview Route (Blue= Start position, Green = End position)

2. *Photo-Experience*

During the walking interview, participants were asked to take a photograph of and describe sites that are particularly meaningful to them. Participants were asked to 1) *take a photo(s) of a place/space in the Wells Avenue corridor that you have seen, experienced,*

or thought of as meaningful and 2) explicitly take a photo of a place/space that records a memory for you. Share the memory (if you feel comfortable), and please provide a couple of sentences as to why you find this place/space meaningful. It was made clear to participants that this photo was to be taken of the structural environment to protect the anonymity of participants and community members. This question/proposal was meant to be open-ended to allow participants to interpret. A disposable camera was provided to the participant to take photos on. A total of 47 photos were taken: ranging from 1-4 photos per participant.

Limitations

Recruitment and scheduling were one of the biggest challenges for this study. While the participants were selected through a snowball method of recruitment, many participants were unable to access another point of contact for the study. This resulted in the data collection being pushed back a couple of weeks later than initially anticipated. Due to the nature of the study, being in-person, and outdoor walking-focused, scheduling with participants was time-demanding. Many interviews had to be rescheduled due to availability and weather. During the interviews, there were some instances where the interviewee forgot to take a photo (for photo activity) because of focusing on the interview, and the participant and I had to walk back to recapture spaces. The use of the disposable camera was efficient and easy for the participants to use, but three of the developed photos were imperceptible.

Working within a changing space and commercial area brought about opportunities and challenges. As I was conducting interviews, new businesses were opening, which began to shift conversations around this commercial space for some of

the participants. The new businesses in the Wells area impacted my approach to future-based questions about this commercial space. As the new businesses began to gain more influence in the ways that the participants discussed the commercial space, I began asking participants about the impact and influence of these newer businesses. While the changing environment produced a natural conversation around the change in this commercial space, I was limited in asking every participant about these spatial changes due to the time and date of the interview. The new businesses and communal spaces in the Wells area provided fruitful conversation around change and development of the commercial space, but I was limited in my ability to discuss specific businesses and changes with each participant.

Analysis

1. Walking Interviews: Interviews were audio recorded and directly put into the transcription service Otter.ai to be auto transcribed. While Otter.ai was accurate in transcribing the verbal data, several mistranslations needed to be remedied. Once the interview data was transcribed and made anonymous, the transcripts were then thematically coded by hand to understand common expressions among all responses (Nowell et al., 2017). A total of 13 interviews were conducted, totaling 186 pages of transcribed and coded interview data. Initial codes made by hand inductively, and were then transferred into an online Sheets document, organized by me. All initial codes were then cross-referenced to evaluate which themes were deductively reoccurring in multiple interviews. These were then organized into parent codes and child codes in a separate Sheet document, categorized by pattern and theme (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2017). The finalized codes were combined to propose three primary themes: The Historical and

Cultural Significance of the Commercial District, a Bittersweet Space, and Imagining the Future.

2. *Photo Activity*: All photos taken during the interviews were taken through a provided disposable camera. Participants were asked to capture a photo of a space/place that has been or *is* meaningful to them today. Succeeding the completion of interviews, the disposable cameras were developed at a local Walgreens. In total, 47 photos were captured by a total of 13 participants. Developed photos were then scanned onto the computer to analyze the consistency amongst various places. A total of 15 different places were captured, with two of the locations captured more than eight times across participants.

These photos were then placed into an interactive map on ArcGIS StoryMap. The interactive map allows viewers to see the location of these meaningful spaces on Wells Avenue while seeing the photo captured by the participants. The interactive map also allows the user to georeference themselves to the location of these places. This allows all users and viewers to see where in Wells Avenue meaningful spaces occur for Hispanic-Latino/a young adults. Under the photos in the StoryMap are quotes provided by some participants as to why these spaces have been or are meaningful to them today. This online StoryMap is used in addition to the written thesis to add visual geographic information as well as written data from interviews for all participants and the public to engage with at their leisure. A link to the completed StoryMap was provided to all participants following the completion of the written thesis (See Appendix B).

Researcher Background

The experiences and perspectives of the Hispanic-Latino/a identifying young-adult community interest me for many reasons. I have enthusiasm to understand the everyday constructions, practices, and experiences of community and place-making through individual stories. I also value this work because I, myself, am a Latina-identifying young adult. I grew up with a White-identifying family and discovered later in life my Hispanic heritage. Where I was unable to engage with my Hispanic culture as a child, this thesis and my RA work on Latino health and housing have allowed me to better understand my belonging in Hispanic-Latino/a spaces. I find my complex upbringing encourages and challenges me to holistically understand diverse types of community-making and culture.

While my own Hispanic/Latina heritage inspired interest in this work, an outcome became my own process of identity making. I grew up in primarily White communities at home and school in Missouri, and this work helped me understand how young Hispanic-Latinos/as, like myself, interpret the world around them and imagine the future. This research has allowed me to reconnect to this part of my identity through the common interpretations and experiences of those who primarily identify as second or third generation Hispanic-Latino/a. My own experience as a third generation Latina and first generation college student related to the lives and experiences of some of my participants. Through this work I have found my own positionality in the Hispanic-Latino/a community.

My relationship with the Wells District began in the Fall of 2021 when I first moved to Reno. Since then, this place has not only been a site where I work, but a place

where I live, eat, socialize, and build relationships. The Wells Avenue commercial corridor is a dynamic district where a variety of businesses, niche services, languages, community resources, and people meet. Interviewees have described it as familial, communal, accessible, sentimental, and a place to “facilitate a sense of community”.

Chapter 4

Historical and Cultural Significance of Commercial District

The results/discussion chapters are organized in a linear structure that represents the multiple temporal positions that young participants occupy in relation to Wells. Chapter 4 discusses participants' memories of Wells; Chapter 5 addresses their present and conflicted relationship to the Wells of today and changes incurred by gentrification and the pandemic; Chapter 6 explores how participants envision a future Wells.

This chapter explores the perceived cultural history and meaning of the Wells commercial district for the Hispanic-Latino/a community by young adults through the lens of their place-based memories. Wells Avenue has long served as an important site for Hispanic-Latino/a engagement and community building, with the commercial district and its businesses playing a significant role. The businesses on Wells Avenue facilitate what has been referred to as a 'Hispanic Hub,' supporting Hispanic-Latino/a needs (Lopez, 2015), and serving as a material connector for family and cultural traditions. In addition, the district hosts annual events that celebrate Hispanic-Latino/a culture, such as Fiesta on Wells during Hispanic Heritage Month, that have endured through the COVID-19 pandemic (Corona, 2021; Lopez, 2015; Palma & Ocampo, 2021).

The young adult perspective captures a complex and ambiguous experience of place (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Valentine, 2019; Vanderbeck, 2007). Like the young people in this study, the Wells commercial district sits at the intersection of a distinct cultural past, an ever-changing present, and a hopeful future; it is a space in a constant state of change and dynamism. Hispanic-Latino/a young adults contextualize the cultural meaning of this commercial space through their own life histories. The memories they

share are often associated with family and community, and they narrate how key commercial sites inform the social relationships and connections important to Hispanic-Latino/a collective identity. They also show how the experience of Wells Avenue today is deeply informed by the past.

This Chapter explores four themes which investigate and uncover the deeply rooted memories and experiences of participants in the Wells Avenue commercial space. The first is familial history as place history. This theme explores how almost every participant shares a memory in Wells Avenue attached to family memory. The memories of the participants demonstrate how family history is embodied in the Wells Avenue businesses. Connected businesses provide commercial goods that are the material resources for family and community identity. The second theme discusses how Wells Avenue is an important source for familial connection across transnational space. Many participants express that their prior engagements in Wells Avenue were, in part, to support the needs of and connect to family members across borders. Participants also expressed that there are many places in this commercial space that support the needs of first- and second-generation Americans and immigrant communities. The third theme is regionalism and a 'taste of home.' My participants explained how the Wells Avenue commercial space allowed them to feel connected to their cultures. There are many diverse geographical and regional background that sit in Wells. While many of the businesses provide cultural necessities, participants expressed a greater sense of place and belonging through this multicultural commercial space (Steigemann, 2019). The theme explores how businesses support the community through cultural events. Many of the businesses and proprietors in Wells Avenue put on dedicated events for the Hispanic-

Latino/a community. Many of my participants explained different memories they had with businesses growing up and how they showed support for diverse cultural events. Where youth predict and imagine a future of space and place, they accomplish this through memory and experience (Andres & Wyn, 2010; Hamilton-Mckenna & Rogers, 2021; Hooks, 2009). Memories of childhood thus inform many of my participants' place-based perceptions and desires today.

1. Commercial Spaces as Sources of Familial and Community Memory

The description of memories that many participants share during our walking interviews along Wells Avenue begin with family. Eleven out of thirteen of my participants grew up frequenting this commercial space with family, and it is through family visits that they became familiarized and continued to understand and experience this district. For the two participants that are more recent to the Wells Avenue/Reno area, they describe Wells Avenue in relation to their familial memories growing up.

Oftentimes, memories and emotions will connect the individual to distant family and cultural activity in Hispanic-Latino/a communities (Weller & Turkon, 2015). As expressed by participants and supported through the literature, Hispanic-Latino/a culture is centered around family (Weller & Turkon, 2015). For example, one participant, Julie, who has grown up in Reno and identifies most with Mexican culture, describes Hispanic-Latino/a community and values. "I think a big part of the Latino community is definitely coming together with family and friends" (Julie, 02/20/23). Another participant, Erika, who grew up in Las Vegas, Nevada, and identifies most with Mexican culture, shares:

I like to say we're really friendly [Hispanic-Latino/a community]. We love to party ... I'm really a family-oriented person. I have family events. I love going to

family events. I love being with my family in Mexico ... I feel like ... we're really big, loud, lively, friendly people (Erika, 02/18/2023).

These descriptions of cultural values are rooted in family and coming together to spend time with one another. For my participants, family is connected to their place-based memories in the Wells Avenue commercial space. For example, Maria, who grew up around the Wells Avenue commercial district, remembers shopping with her mother as a child at what used to be Kings Ranch, but today is known as Marketon.



Image 1. Photo taken by Maria of Marketon grocery store in Wells Avenue.

It was very ... convenient for it to be here [Marketon]. Not just for my family, but for other families. For it to be like a walking distance and ... I think ... it being very community based and helping ... families. I just, I grew up coming here a lot ... So, I have a lot of sentimental attachment coming here (Maria, 11/17/2022).

For Maria, King's Ranch, and its current iteration Marketon, is significant not only as a site where Maria spent time with her mother, but also as an important source of familial *and* community support. Maria's memory of grocery shopping with her mother also

speaks to the history of the Wells Avenue commercial space, through the subtle change in the grocery store from her childhood to today. Through Maria, this type of community and collectivism is remembered in Wells Avenue. These memories still inform her attachment and understanding of this place today. Similarly, Margaret, who has been in Reno since childhood, shares:

My family used to shop at Marketon. Sometimes they would buy ... other Mexican food. So, if it's Christmas or New Year's or birthday parties they'd always come here ... and buy ...our fruits and vegetables. We also used to go to Mundo Latino, which is ... pretty big for the Hispanic community because they have a lot of ... Mexican attire for like Mexican parties, like quinceañeras (Margaret, 02/22/23).

Margaret's memory in Wells has reminded them of events that are reflective of their culture and community, which their family celebrated. We see through the work of Rios & Vasquez that commercial spaces for Hispanic-Latino/a communities constitute a collaborative effort to bring communities together for various gatherings (Rios & Vasquez, 2012). For both Maria and Margaret, Marketon in Wells Avenue is a place which served the community and supported cultural needs through events and community. Another participant, Michael, who was born in Reno and identifies with Salvadoran and Guatemalan culture, shares his recent experience of visiting the Salvadorian restaurant, *Asi es Mi Tierra*, with his mom following a visit to the Community Health Alliance, a low-cost healthcare provider used by many Hispanic-Latino/a families. During the visit, they recalled memories of coming when Michael was

a child.



Image 2. Photo taken by Michael of Asi es Mi Tierra in Wells Avenue.

My mom and I were down here ... We were at Community Health Alliance, because she goes there for her primary care, and after she was like ... Oh, I'm hungry, ... let's go eat somewhere, and you know, that day, she said... Honey, I want...Salvadorian, look up if there's anything new in town... I think we've been here before [Asi es Mi Tierra] ... Yeah, we used to go there when you were a little kid... it brought back memories where I remember sitting there with ...my parents and my family (Michael, 02/20/2023).

Michael's reflection and image show how his present relationship to Wells is informed by childhood memories of parental and familial engagement within Wells Avenue district. He and his mom reflected on a Hispanic-Latino/a business which was important to them both in the past. Participants express how cultural values of family have been

heavily place-based in the Wells Avenue commercial district, where many of their memories are connected to family excursions.

In addition to serving as sites for family and community connection, Wells Avenue has been a place of *things*, the consumer goods that businesses provide to facilitate the cultural life of the community. Commercial goods are thus cultural goods, and Wells businesses are important for the cultural goods they provide. Alicia, who lived near Wells Avenue growing up, discusses this theme through the lens of a grocery store.

I think you would ask people where they would go to shop for ... Mexican food, Mexican ingredients.... and it would be down here [Wells Avenue]. You can't really go to a regular grocery store, like Raleys... there's a tiny section [of Mexican ingredients] ...And here you have a whole store, so it's ...where we go to get whatever we need specifically for *our* needs (Alicia, 12/29/2022).

Places like Marketon that cater specifically to the Hispanic-Latino/a community provide the material goods to sustain cultural food traditions that are not provided in other grocery stores, like Raley's. Alicia also proposes that Wells Avenue provides one of the *only* grocery stores (Marketon) for the needs of the Hispanic-Latino/a community.

Similarly, Edith says:

I think ... in this area, there's a high Latino population. So, I feel like this is definitely... hub for ... traditional Mexican needs ... whenever my mom's like, oh, I want to make pozole ... She knows she could rely on Marketon to have the kind of food that she wants. So, I imagine it's similar for other folks too, that live in this area ... If I think about it, if I'm looking for traditional, like Hispanic food, I don't know where else I would look other than here, ... I know there's more outside of Reno, outside of ...this area, but I feel like this is ... something that you can rely on, and I think that's how the businesses are working with the community. Knowing that they can do something that they can rely on. They've also been here for so long ... I've literally known Wells since I could remember (Edith, 03/07/2023).

Alicia's and Edith's memories and opinions of Wells Avenue provide insight into the cultural significance of this space. Particularly in what Edith shares, there is an emphasis

of reliability from Wells businesses; these commercial spaces are always going to be there. Some participants even go out of their way to access the goods in Wells Avenue. While a few did grow up in the surrounding neighborhoods of Wells Avenue, many families traveled quite a long way to access the goods in Wells Avenue: many from Sparks, South Reno, Sun Valley, Neil Road, North Stead, and Lemmon Valley. The businesses and places in Wells Avenue continue to influence the interpretations of this space today for many of my participants. Humanist geographer Yi-Fu Tuan expressed in early humanist work that exploring how individuals understand and think about place derives from their own attachments with family (Tuan, 1979). Family thus becomes a tool for understanding and interpreting space and place (Holt-Jensen, 2001; Tuan, 1979). As suggested by Tuan and through the work of geographer Daniel Arreola, family plays a huge role in the ability to connect to a place, particularly, for Hispanic-Latino/a communities (Arreola, 2004; Tuan, 1979). It is exemplified by the participants that family is key to their connection to the Wells Avenue commercial space.

2. A ‘Taste of Home’: Commercial Representation of Regional Diversity

There is an assumption that communities in Reno-Sparks are homogenous when, in fact, my participants share that there is an array of cultures and ethnicities represented in the Wells Avenue commercial space. While many of my participants identify most with Mexican heritage and culture, Wells Avenue provides a connection to ‘homes’ across the Latin world. Through participants we understand that there *is* a variation in regional identities for many who have engaged and continue to engage in the Wells Avenue commercial space. Many participants share how Wells Avenue was a reminder

of home through cultural touches, community perception, and physical designs. Maria describes this through her experience growing up in Wells,

Growing up as a Latina here makes you, it makes me, feel very in touch with my culture. It gave me the opportunity to kinda [sic] give me a little taste of Mexico in a way, and it wasn't until I went to Mexico, as an adult, where ... the streets are not all the same, but kind of the same. Everything was ... a business ... a Mexican business. So, it's pretty cool having been able to grow up with that little taste of Mexico (Maria, 11/17/2022).

Maria's description of growing up experiencing Wells Avenue as a Latina, allowed her to briefly engage with her Mexican heritage. Where there were obvious differences in place, she feels that growing up with a 'taste' allowed her to connect with a piece of that identity. For one participant Tony who moved to Reno in 2021 and is originally from Las Vegas, and identifies as a second-generation, expresses how Wells was a reminder of Latino neighborhoods in Las Vegas.

So, I moved here in 2021 and ... I was looking for places to live around Reno ... where I felt comfortable and where... I would like to spend my time. So, when I found this apartment [his current apartment in Wells Avenue], it was a refreshing day ... it had just been posted, and it was a decent price for what my girlfriend and I could do. It fell maybe a little higher than I wanted to, but I just loved the area. Because it was close to things that remind me of back home because I'm from Vegas ... It's just around a lot of things that I'm familiar with, and also ... close to school [University of Nevada]. So that's why I chose to live here (Tony, 02/04/2023).

Tony has connected to Wells Avenue through a domestic connection from his neighborhoods in Las Vegas to Reno. Tony has been able to connect to Wells Avenue because he had a similar connection to the Latino spaces in Las Vegas. The community and identity embodied in Wells facilitates a space where people can familiarize quickly and feel comfortable because it reminds them of their homes. Daniela, who was born in Reno, also speaks to the 'feel' and identity of Wells Avenue. "I think it's a homey feeling

[being in Wells Avenue]. It's a reminder of what you grew up with. You know, like, you have this smell right now that I'm getting, I'm like, oh my God, Mexico” (Daniela, 02/15/2023). Daniela identifies with a sense of home and connection to her childhood by being in Wells. Even something as subtle as the ‘smell’ connects her to her family’s Mexican heritage.

Michael, whose family came to the U.S. from El Salvador and Guatemala discusses how his mother is always looking for traditional Salvadorian food. While there is limited access to such things in Reno, Wells has been a reminder to him and his mom about familiar eateries.

My mom is always looking for new shops, restaurants, new outlets, really, that are Hispanic owned, just because I feel like she's constantly trying to connect to the culture. ... getting that sense of familiarity. Familiarity ... so, yeah ... I think she looks for spaces like this [Asi es Mi Tierra], whether she does it consciously or subconsciously, I'm not entirely sure. But I do think that she looks for spaces like this, and I say that because, you know, oftentimes, we'll talk about, oh, where should we go eat and she's like, I'm craving something Salvadorian. But then she'll be like, oh, we don't really have, a lot of options other than ... two that we've eaten at ... or she'll say Oh, I haven't eaten food from another Latino country in forever, but we only have ... one restaurant, and, you know ... so I think coming down here is it's a bit of a refresher for sure. When she's able to come down here (Michael, 02/20/2023).

In Michael’s experience, his mom struggles to find places with authentic Salvadorian food, but in Wells Avenue he is often able to find foods that can help him, and his mom, familiarize and connect with their culture. Additionally, when asked to describe Wells Avenue, Cristiano, who has Mexican, Salvadoran, and Guatemalan heritage, discusses how some of the physical features in Wells remind him of Mexico.

For Wells I would say culture, Hispanic culture, Latino culture. You come here and you feel like you’re at home. I mean, from the brick aesthetics to, you know, the style of the roofing, you know, even our clinic [Community Health Alliance]

and H&R Block, even just the style in general is very much like Mexico (Cristiano, 02/16/2023).

For Cristiano, even the style and aesthetic are familiar and reminds them of Mexico.

Through these experiences and memories, Wells is not just a homogenized commercial space, where there is only one culture, ethnicity, or heritage being embraced, rather, it is a space which allows different communities to exist and share connections to their homes and culture.

3. Wells as a Transnational Space Through Immigrant Resources and Services

As described in the previous section, the cultural goods and resources within Wells Avenue are not just about those residing in the neighborhood and city. Wells Avenue embodies a transnational space which encompasses a network of flows and connections that is unbound (Massey, 1994). Many participants discussed how the business landscape of Wells offers services to connect families globally, of vital importance to immigrant families. For example, Cristiano, who has grown up north of Reno and identifies as second-generation, discusses, and captures how the business, Mundo Latino, supported his father through his experience as an immigrant.



Image 3. Photo taken by Cristiano of El Mundo Latino

You know, back then in the day, my father was an immigrant, and he would come here all the time to exchange money. We would get American dollars and change them to pesos, vice versa, and we would buy these little cards to be able to call internationally. Yeah, so that's how we communicated with each other back then. So, this is like the spot that we would always go to when I was younger (Cristiano, 02/16/2023).

This memory captures the generational ties to place, but also illuminates the support that these businesses provided to Cristiano and his father as an immigrant. Being able to access cards to call internationally also connected Cristiano to his family in other countries. Maria also describes the business, La Milagrosa, as supporting the ability to send checks to family in Mexico.

People can go and change the checks there who can't have a bank. So, we go to ... Latino stores like those [La Milagrosa]. Even over here, they do as well [Mundo Latino]. They change people's checks, or you can send out money to your family members who are in a different country (Maria, 11/17/2022).

For Maria, she remembers going into some of the businesses in Wells Avenue to send money to family across borders, and it was accessible for her and her mother. Another participant, Kate, who was born in Reno and identifies with Mexican culture, describes, and captures a similar use, but through the business Envios de Dinero.



Image 4. Photo taken by Kate of Envios de Dinero

I feel like this place...Envios Dinero meaning that they can send money here. A lot of people who come from ... Mexico is starting a new life here, and they're normally working here to send money back home. [Went to different location] I think the one we went on was more on Oddie... they have similar things. We'd send money back to Mexico specifically more towards my dad's family because they're the ones who stayed over there. So, I feel like that's very important, because that's how they provide, and those are the same kinds of stores being closed (Kate, 03/03/2023).

Through Kate's experience there is a deep necessity to have some of these money transferring businesses so that families can connect to one another. For Kate, places like this are a means to provide a livelihood for families across borders while allowing for financial access and are further accessible through their business name. It is also expressed by the participants that cultural businesses like Envios de Dinero and Mundo Latino have been helpful in interpreting documents for their family members. Edith remembers shopping in Wells with her family and coming to different businesses for translation services.

There's a place [Eagle Tax & Immigration Services] where you can get help translating your birth certificate. My parents needed that person because of paperwork. Because you know, their birth certificates are in Spanish. So, they came here because they do translation services ... there's like a lot of things and services and like, just basic things that we've got from here (Edith, 03/07/2023).

These are basic services that families need done in Wells Avenue, and Edith knows these places as reliable sources for such needs. Additionally, Alicia expresses that her family consistently utilizes translation services in Wells Avenue for formal tax documents because she has built a relationship and trust with the proprietors.

Yeah, you know, because it's what they're comfortable with. They know there's like Spanish speaking people, like when they have to get their taxes done, they come to this guy down here because he speaks Spanish. So, it's just like, they know, this is like their comfort area where they're going to find services that are going to be able to help them and talk to them without needing our help (Alicia, 12/29/2022).

How Alicia explains that the comfortability and rapport built with businesses in Wells Avenue by her and her family illuminates an important feature: trust. Many of these businesses can serve communities on the margin, particularly immigrant communities, because there is a comfort and trust built. There is comfort and security through Wells

businesses and their ability to speak to cultural and familial needs. Wells Avenue has operated alongside the community to bridge borders and boundaries to connect individuals to their families. This support is exemplified through young people's memories and important experiences.

4. Cultural Events Supported by Businesses

Wells businesses are a vital part of the cultural events hosted in the district, according to participants. These cultural events are not just parties, but expressions of culture and community for many of my participants. Support through the businesses in Wells Avenue deepens my participants' connections to this commercial space and sense of culture and reliance. Maria described what the old market, Kings Ranch (today known as Marketon), provided for the community and through events.

It had a little bit of everything you know [Kings Ranch], of course groceries and music food. They would have activities to like for Christmas. Not for Christmas, but it's called Los Reyes Magos. They would bring camels outside of the store and give people the little kids gifts (Maria, 11/17/2022).

This also happens to be one of the biggest memories that stands out for Maria, she states,

What stands out the most is what I told you about the market that would bring camels and gifts for kids, and like clowns. That would come as well. I think that that's what stands out most in my memory of Wells. Just seeing how they did that, and they brought the community together and just giving you know, little kiddos gifts because you don't know like your parents weren't able to buy gifts for the kids (Maria, 11/17/2022).

The support Maria felt from the businesses was not only in support of her culture and events, but of her family and the community. It was nice to see the businesses come together to support families through the holidays.

Many participants also expressed memories of getting quinceañera needs with family while in Wells Avenue. Nayeli states: "When I was 15, and I had the quinceañera,

we walked on the street to go look for some, you know, just like things we might need for the quinceañera. Dresses we looked at like, party decorations and such” (Nayeli, 02/10/2023). Wells has been known to Nayeli and her family as the place to go for these kinds of needs. While she did utilize Wells for their own quinceañera needs, she also practiced dancing for quinceañeras along Wells.



Image 5. Photo taken by Nayeli of Stylos Dance Studio

“Yeah, and I remember I practiced there. I was a Dama for a lot of quinceañeras there. So that was fun” (Nayeli, 02/10/2023). Another participant, Edith, expresses how the businesses at Wells served her family through many cultural events in her childhood, including her quinceañera and first communion dress.

In the Mundo Latino, the lady that helped me pick out my first communion dress, helped me also picked out my quinceañera dress ... so it's like that piece of ...

relationships. I know this person will help me out, in whatever stage of life I'm in ... if I ever get married, I'm probably gonna [sic] pick up the dresses there too. Just because ... a lot of what I saw was because of my parents ... they introduced me to this, and this is kind of what I knew for a little while when I was younger. So ... I know that if I ever did need something, I could come here and I think that's what maybe the Hispanic community is, is like, is the trust and being able to rely on each other (Edith, 03/07/2023).

Edith's experience with Wells Avenue is not only culturally connected with her family and the goods provided but expresses the connections and significance of places for her and her family, and trust. The connections Edith created in Wells through her family and the businesses are sustainable and something she could go into for future endeavors.

Alicia also remembers spending time in Wells with her family and noticing the quinceañera dresses in the window of La Milagrosa.

Going shopping at what used to be King Ranch ... now Marketon, and coming here, it was usually like a whole day thing, and they brought you in here [La Milagrosa] and you got to look at all the pretty quinceañera dresses, and just all the stuff was a very rare thing to do. Really. I mean, you come to shop for something special in the stores, you know, for big events (Alicia, 12/29/2022).

Shopping for quinceañera needs was not just a casual trip to Wells Avenue, but a big event and special to Alicia. Through her memory we know that the 'rare' occasion of getting a quinceañera dress was important culturally. One participant, Julie, also talked about the cultural significance of the Wells Avenue commercial space. These memories, all rare and precious, express the celebration of culture and events through businesses.

Conclusion

Many of the participants describe Hispanic-Latino/a community as being close-knit, trusting, supportive, unified, uplifting, inclusive, and overall embracing cultural traditions. This definition is attached to their own experiences from their families and their community in and outside the Wells Avenue space. This chapter surmises that

family plays a role in the participants' history within the Wells Avenue commercial space and serves as a symbol of how they view the commercial space today. Almost all their memories revolved around familial anecdotes and interactions. My participants also share how this commercial space serves as a site of cultural understanding and cohesion for the Hispanic-Latino/a community through its celebration of shared cultures, traditions, and recognition of the diversity within. Many felt that it is the commercial landscape of Wells Avenue that provided formative memories of family and community. To this end, Wells Avenue also sources resources explicitly for the immigrant community. For this reason, Wells is also a transnational space where many participants grew up with family members receiving language services, translation services, and money transferring services. These services not only supported their families' immediate needs as first and second-generation Americans but connected many of them to their families across borders. Lastly, this chapter describes how important Hispanic-Latino/a cultural events were supported by businesses in Wells Avenue through space and commodities. Many of my participants have memories of taking dance classes for quinceañeras and relying heavily on some of the businesses like the Mundo Latino to provide dresses and party supplies. These businesses actively connect community and culture. Memories of family, community, and the Wells Avenue commercial space come together to facilitate a space of cultural belonging and collective identity for young people that is a visceral part of their childhoods and their connection to the place today.

Sociologist Anna Steigemann states, "Businesses are used for practices that are usually ascribed to home spaces, or at least, spaces where people have a sense of ownership, familiarity and belonging" (Steigemann, 2019, p. 239). Businesses are

offering more than just a commodity. They are the connective glue for cultural connection, tradition, and the formation of familiarity. This familiarity facilitates a sense of place for participants and creates a sense of home and belonging (Hayden, 1995; Rios & Vasquez, 2012; Steigemann, 2019). Through these experiences, young adults are imagining and remembering these spaces through some of the cultural services, as well as the connection to their specific cultural needs (Rios & Vasquez, 2012; Steigemann, 2019). What are seemingly everyday experiences, like social interaction and grocery shopping, are in fact practices of place connection and belonging. Businesses are places where community, belonging, and connection are created (Steigemann, 2019). This is displayed by the memories of my participants in many of the businesses in the Wells Avenue commercial spaces.

Chapter 5

“Bittersweet” Space: Where many factors come into play for change in Wells Avenue

In the last chapter, I explained the cultural meaning of the Wells commercial district for participants rooted in their place-based memories of family and community. This chapter focused on how participants perceive and understand present day changes in the commercial space. Spatial change, construction, and deconstruction are constantly occurring in place (Massey, 1994). Where space and place are dynamic and ever-changing, how it is understood varies in meaning and engagement (Massey, 1994/2013). Similarly, Wells Avenue is a commercial space in constant flux. Participants identified two major processes that inform current change, gentrification, and pandemic restrictions.

The Wells district, a composition of businesses and services that are on and adjacent to Wells Avenue and the surrounding neighborhoods, has gone through an intensive period of change since 2019 (Glenn, n.d.); sources share that new developments like the Reno Public Market (as part of the Reno Experience District or R.E.D) (Burrows, 2021), more uniform architectural styles, and improved access to resources speak to a few of the expressed developments in Wells Avenue and adjacent developments on Plumb and Virginia (Burrows, 2021; Palma & Ocampo, 2021). These socio-economic changes were attributed to gentrification occurring in Wells Avenue (Palma & Ocampo, 2021), but also COVID-19 exposed communities and businesses in Wells Avenue the most in 2020, at the height of the pandemic (Hidalgo, 2021). Ongoing effects of the pandemic continue to affect the communities and businesses within the commercial space (Hidalgo, 2021; Palma & Ocampo, 2021). My participants often described changes

within Wells Avenue through the term ‘gentrification’ and through pandemic-induced changes.

Neighborhood change in Wells Avenue is highly understood as the effect of gentrification from my participants. For participants, gentrification had already profoundly changed the Wells Avenue landscape before the interview. They perceive that these changes are ignited by changes in the neighboring Midtown district, which extends from/includes Plumas Street to Holcomb Avenue, and East Liberty Street to West Plumb Lane (See figures 1 & 2 below) (Higdon, 2016).

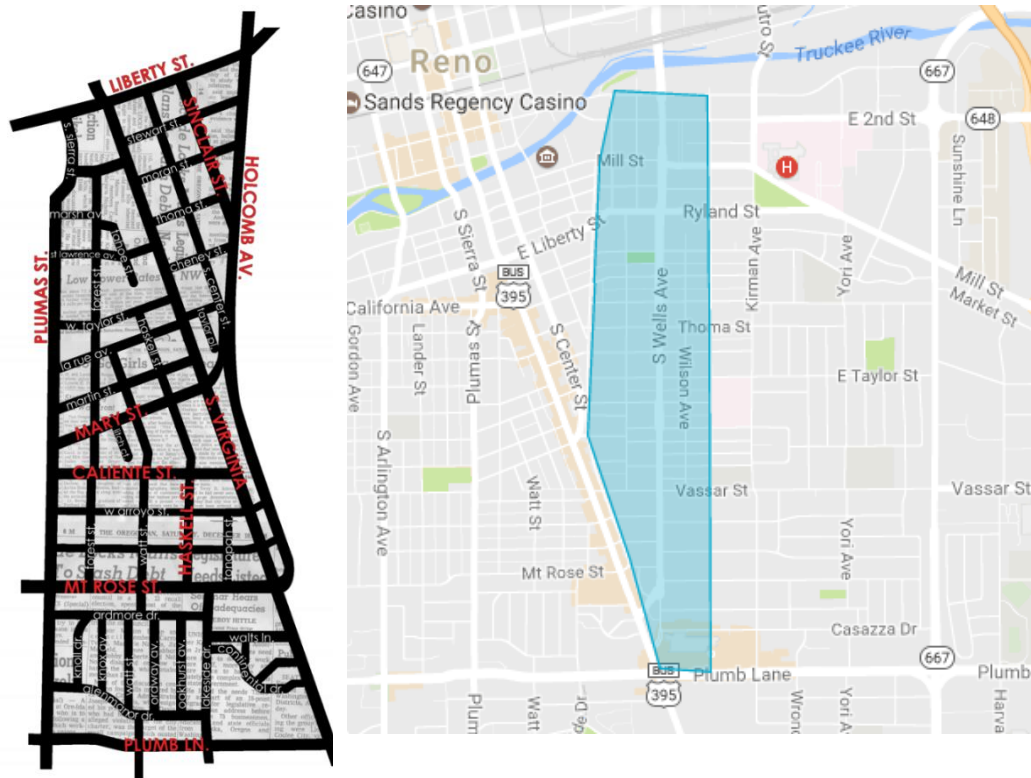


Figure 3 (left). Midtown as determined by founders (Higdon, 2016).

Figure 1 (right). Wells Avenue Commercial District as determined by Google Maps (see methods section for further interpretation).

Gentrification, a contentious term in geographic work, describes a process of upper-class capital systems displacing and marginalizing working-class communities (Glass, 1960; Smith, 1987/1996/2002/2010). This interpretation suggests that a binary exists; there are those who gentrify (inflicting and exacerbating displacement and dispossession) and those *being* gentrified (experiencing the effects of displacement and dispossession) (Doucet, 2009). This binary is primarily described in geographic literature on gentrification (Harvey, 1996; Smith, 2002; Smith, 2010). On the contrary, scholars like Doucet, Butcher and Dickens critique this binary through the lens of young people (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Doucet, 2009). While participants *do* believe that change in Wells Avenue is becoming increasingly like Midtown and heavily gentrifying (Rush, 2021), the participants bring new meaning to these new developments which complicate and disregard the common binary when describing this process.

During the interviews, the COVID-19 pandemic was also mentioned as a contributing factor to effects on the communities and businesses in Wells Avenue. Data from across the country reinforce this belief. While the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the economic sustainability and resiliency of all small businesses across America and Nevada (Small Business Development Center report), minority-owned businesses were disproportionately impacted (Dua et al., 2021; Hidalgo, 2021). While Wells Avenue was heavily exposed to different health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hidalgo, 2021), the change in Wells Avenue through this work is focused on the perceptions of my participants. Many of my participants perceive that COVID-19 did affect the community and businesses but has not lingered enough to disproportionately impact the community. Rather, the focus is on gentrification and neighborhood change.

Participants expressed a mix of emotions when it came to perceived and experienced changes in the built environment in addition to the composition of businesses, customers, and residents of Wells Avenue. As young adults, they sit in a temporal and liminal place of understanding (Wood, 2015) where they take into consideration the feelings and experiences of others, they can imagine space and place through multiple generations and their own experiences (Hooks, 2009; Wood, 2015). This chapter focuses on the conflict within my participants: their perceptions and interpretations of the change in the Wells Avenue commercial district today. In their memories they know Wells as an important commercial space, but still not fully safe or inviting for all communities. Many express changes in Wells are necessary to even want to walk the streets with friends and family and feel safe and secure. So, this change is not inherently bad but can give possibilities to the community and to their own futures. Many believe that the commercial spaces, particularly in Wells Avenue, can bridge the malintents of gentrification and disinvestment through cultural connection and community building for the future, disrupting the binary (Doucet, 2009). My participants consider the perspectives and emotions of their family members and community when imagining this future. Where many are supportive and encouraging of change, they have concerns that their families may be impacted in negative ways. Their own desires and position within the Wells Avenue space is thus positioned in the middle as ‘bittersweet.’ Where many of them do not utilize this commercial space anymore, their hopes and desires still exist. This chapter will explore the complexity of the youth narrative (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Hamilton-Mckenna & Rogers, 2021) around place change in the form of gentrification and pandemic-induced changes, emphasizing the temporal,

intergenerational, and paradoxical nature of these perspectives and interpretations (Johnston, 2016; Vanderbeck, 2007, Valentine, 2019).

1. Perceived Gentrification in Commercial Space, and Impacts on ‘Places of Memory’

For many participants, it was clear that significant changes were occurring in the Wells Avenue commercial space. They often described these changes through the term ‘gentrification.’ Participants also briefly attribute changes in businesses to the effects of COVID-19. While many businesses were supported by the local community throughout the pandemic, changes longer in the making, due to gentrification within the community and businesses of Wells Avenue, further disadvantaged their ability to stay afloat. How participants characterized the features of gentrification emerged during walking interviews. Through interviews, participants pointed to specific features of gentrification, such as the loss or movement of certain businesses, new walkways and murals, new buildings with better signage, more uniformity or standardization in the new buildings, and less litter on the streets. It is important to note that they found the most visceral signs of neighborhood change in the commercial landscape. When describing these features, they often associated them with impact on community: change in target clientele of businesses, constant construction, increase in prices of goods and housing, and a change in the racial or ethnic identity on the streets. For example, structural design came out when Nayeli was describing the implementation of the Reno Public Market off Plumb Street. Nayeli states,

Places like the Public Marketplace ... the ... Safeway ... Sprouts, I feel like there's almost ... gentrification to this area, just because things are ... looking different than what is here [Wells Avenue]. Yeah, I mean, if you go to Sprouts,

it's a lot pricier than going to a different one like WinCo or Marketon or you know, different types of food. It's kind of different than the population here or was here (Nayeli, 02/10/2023).

Nayeli expresses that the shopping centers at the South end of Wells Avenue which have a Sprouts grocery store and the Reno Public Market are expressions of gentrification in the commercial space. These stores look different, provide different goods, attract a different community, and are pricier than what you could find at a grocery store like Marketon, signaling that gentrification is occurring near Wells Avenue. Nayeli also suggests that the population in Wells Avenue is not the target population for these new businesses arriving in the commercial space, as they cater to primarily White communities. Participant Michael also discussed how ongoing construction and change along Wells Avenue has changed the landscape. He states,

I think it's definitely grown a lot more [Wells Avenue]. I remember when they were doing construction around here and things were really messy. Now ... one of the biggest things that crossed my mind was like, oh my god, like gentrification, and ... are they just gonna[sic] make everything super inaccessible, expensive? Because I feel like that is ... happening to Plumb, you know, where there's also a big Latino community (Michael, 02/20/2023).

Michael expresses concern about the construction throughout the interview. He reflects on how the construction he sees in surrounding areas is producing gentrified spaces in Wells Avenue today. Michael describes a greater effect of gentrification occurring in similar commercial spaces with a strong Hispanic-Latino/a presence like Plumb. Michael emphasizes a fear of inaccessibility for the community. Gentrification is also described as change within the residential spaces surrounding Wells Avenue. Nayeli states,

I feel like now that they're cleaning it up [Wells Avenue], and they put all these expensive apartments in and made it super luxurious, that attracts a certain population and the place like Sprouts and ... the Public Marketplace fell into ... gentrification, but I think a plus that *I* can get out that ... is ... [that these are]

spaces for like different Hispanics, but a different population than [is] here (Nayeli, 02/10/2023).

Through Nayeli's perspective, the new residential apartments being built in the Wells Avenue neighborhood draw the kinds of people that shop at places like Sprouts and the Public Market: largely wealthier White people. The two go hand-in-hand, and the new commercial space in the making reflects a new target population for the neighborhood. While Nayeli's point does suggest a form of commercial displacement, she also points out that these businesses could attract different Hispanic-Latino/a populations to the Wells Avenue commercial space that have not there before. As I'll describe below, good, and bad imagined effects were often discussed simultaneously. Cristiano expresses how he is seeing positive change in the commercial space through the 'clean up' of public space and improved infrastructure. The lack of this prior meant that certain spots would not be attractive to spend time in previously.

It's insane like ... these ... crosswalks and streetlights we didn't have these before in Wells it was just this dark area where ... people got shot, people fought, people did drugs, ... it wasn't a safe area to begin with, but to really see it, you know do more ... make ... more acceptable to the whole population of Reno. It's nice to see that more people can feel comfortable walking down or jogging like that man who just passed down the street (Cristiano, 02/16/2023).

As Cristiano is actively engaging in Wells Avenue, he notices that it is not the place it used to be and some of the features, because of new investment in this commercial space, have created a safer Wells for all people. Participant Kate also discusses gentrification through the eyes and perspective of the Hispanic-Latino/a community.

I've seen more gentrification happening out here [Wells Avenue]. Like, we're seeing a lot of changes, places being knocked down and stuff like that, to try to change them. Because they know what's tied to, I guess, this specific community [Hispanic-Latino/a], it's kind of similar to ... Neil Road ... I would say that they're trying to make changes. (Kate, 03/03/2023).

Kate feels that changes to the businesses and effects of gentrification is not just a displacement of businesses for the community, but a disruption in the Hispanic-Latino/a spaces. Kate expresses that many businesses are being knocked down in Wells Avenue so that they can be changed, and she suggests there may be an intentional displacement of Hispanic-Latino/a businesses. While Kate and other participants did not name any specific businesses which had shut down, they expressed businesses were missing. This is not just occurring in Wells Avenue, but also Neil Road. Despite some general observation of an overall ‘nicer’ space by participants, many questioned the motives and consequences of District improvements. Michael, when speaking to the perceived gentrification occurring, states:

For me, gentrification means coming into a space and trying to make it “nicer”, but usually, that just means, “nicer” by European standards ... like White standards, and what that results in usually is housing being inaccessible to working class or the people that were there and so they kick them out you know, they spike rent up to a point where it's like, okay, well, now I can't live here and now it's more affluent. Usually, White people move in you know ... I would describe it as kind of diluting a culture in a certain spot (Michael, 02/20/2023).

Michael’s description of gentrification speaks directly to a fear of homogenization in the Wells Avenue commercial space. Michael notes that gentrification is typically the process of making a space “nicer” by European standards that displaces working-class people and especially working-class people of color so that, typically, White populations can take over a space and homogenize culture. Michael’s interpretation of gentrification aligns closest to the description of Marxist geographers Neil Smith and David Harvey: a process of upper-class systems recomposing working-class spaces (Harvey, 1996; Smith, 2002; Smith, 2010). The effects of this process are socio-economic marginalization and

displacement (Harvey, 1996; Smith, 2010). Margaret echoes this sentiment by stating, “Yeah, I feel like gentrification ... makes everything more Americanized, or ‘pretty.’ Like, a lot of culture will be gone, and they will have to go somewhere else or to find their day-to-day needs” (Margaret, 02/22/2023). Gentrification is not just the dispossession or displacement of community, but it is a loss of cultural resources in Wells Avenue. For Margaret, gentrification produces an Americanization of the commercial space such that the cultural goods and necessities of immigrant communities and communities of color in Wells Avenue, described in Chapter 4, will disappear, and need to be accessed elsewhere.

Participants also discussed COVID-19 pandemic-induced changes in the Wells Avenue commercial space. While the pandemic was a large scale and sudden health event, its impacts created or exacerbated the kinds of social and economic inequalities in urban landscapes that were already at work through processes like gentrification. Fragile communities became more fragile. My participants express that while ongoing change was happening in Wells Avenue prior to the pandemic, the pandemic masked the extent of changes that were happening in Wells. Many participants, while walking, were surprised to see all that had changed due to both gentrification and the pandemic. Participants briefly describe their opinions on how the community and businesses were affected throughout the pandemic and what that means for Hispanic-Latinos/as in the commercial space. Nayeli shares:

I feel like it probably slowed down a lot with the pandemic [business in Wells Avenue]. I feel like a lot of little spots kind of shut down. Yeah, because I know during that time, and even like afterwards, I mean, I wasn't going out too much. Oh, and I wasn't coming through here since everything was online. So, I imagined things slowed down a lot (Nayeli, 02/10/2023).

Nayeli describes how little spots she remembers in Wells Avenue shut down through the pandemic and how the pandemic slowed down everything in the area. When describing the workers and businesses on Wells Avenue, Kate states:

Most people who ... have stores like that [Hispanic-Latino/a business's], most of them don't have insurance for themselves. So, they were struck with COVID or something like that ... and they probably weren't able to get the care that they needed. I would say maybe a lot of them have ... undocumented workers too. So, some of those people may not be able to file for unemployment during the shutdown. So ... all that ties together that not only the company itself has been affected, but a lot of the workers too, because they can't get a job anywhere else, or at least one that's able to help them as much (Kate, 02/22/2023).

Kate, like many in the community, was particularly attuned to how the pandemic impacted undocumented people and families. She indicates that many of the workers and businesses on Wells Avenue struggled because of lack of insurance for themselves and employees. She suggests that it may have been difficult for these businesses to acquire insurance because of lack of documentation or having workers that were undocumented. She speaks of the fact that many of the businesses rely on a very precarious workforce, which was made even more vulnerable through the pandemic, placing businesses and patrons at a further disadvantage in Wells Avenue. Edith also shares:

When I see these businesses [Asi es Mi Tierra, Antojitos Colibrí, Las Palamos], I don't think they're bringing in a ton of money. I would say the one that probably does the most business is Marketon or Mundo Latino ... but the other ones are like small little family businesses, so it was like, oh, are they going to close? I thought the Pupusa place right here was gonna close [Asi es Mi Tierra}, and that was scary, because ... those are my favorites ... They are such small businesses ... I don't think they would have been able to hold on super long in the pandemic. So that was kind of sad ... it's our community. It's what we're used to, and it's disappearing (Edith, 03/07/2023).



Image 6. Taken by Edith of Antojitos Colibrí

Edith’s experiences through the pandemic didn’t just bring up the fact that there were less businesses open but intensified the feeling that many Hispanic-Latino/a businesses and commercial spaces were just dwindling away: a feeling that many were already experiencing because of perceived impacts of gentrification.

This theme revealed how participants describe, understand, and interpret gentrification in Wells Avenue. Participants describe gentrification as a force which gives and takes. While new businesses are coming into the community to make the commercial space “nicer,” this process is inflected with racial and ethnic politics. There is a clear displacement and dispossession occurring particularly for Hispanic-Latino/a spaces and businesses. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, participants were then able to think

through their own opinions as to what happened to businesses in the Wells Avenue commercial space. Almost all concluded that small Hispanic-Latino/a spaces and businesses were the most disrupted. To summarize, participants believe that the existing community, culture, and businesses in Wells Avenue are most at risk of experiencing the effects of gentrification and the COVID-19 pandemic. These effects include displacement, dispossession, lack of resources, increased costs, and assimilation of culture. These concerns, however, are also coupled with feelings of hope and some sincere desire for change in the Wells Avenue commercial space: these changes *can* serve the existing community in positive ways.

2. Considerations of family in perceptions of change and impact

Given the historical meaning of the Wells district for participants rooted in childhood memories, as explained in Chapter 4, it is not surprising that significant concerns or hopes regarding gentrification often focused on family (Weller & Turkon, 2015). The focus on family is an important element of the youth perspective of gentrification because youth perceptions of gentrification are complicated by various networks of relationships. Geographers Melissa Butcher and Luke Dickens state: “This experience of gentrification is inflected by several variables, including disposition, context such as education and employment, peer and family relationships and existing stresses within families” (Butcher & Dickens, 2016, p. 813). Furthermore, as young people *imagine* space and place, they engage in intergenerational practices which embrace the merging of generational perspectives into visions of the future of space and place (Diprose et al., 2019). The feelings around change in the Wells Avenue commercial space by participants involve their own personal perceptions, desires, and experiences, as

well as their families'. Sometimes, these things are contradictory, as I will explain later. When considering the impacts of neighborhood change on their families, they are also considering how differences along lines of age, class, accessibility, first-generation vs. second generation needs, and experiences affect one's relationship to place. Their insight reiterates that the Hispanic/Latino/a community is not homogenous in experience or need. Given that family plays an immense role in the participants' memories and perceptions of the Wells Avenue District, many of the participants consider how neighborhood change in the form of gentrification will impact their families. Maria states:

If you think for older generations, it's [change] probably harder. Harder to accept change ... Forced to adjust to new things, and I think sometimes they just stick to what they know, and they won't step into the newer spots ... like my mom, she knows Marketon is there, and that's where she will go ... so just going to familiar faces. [Maria's mom] Not really paying attention to like the newer things (Maria, 11/17/2022).

Maria believes that it would be much harder for her mother's generation to accept change occurring in the Wells Avenue space, because it is not *familiar*. Maria expresses that it may be harder for older generations to adjust to change because they stick to places and people that they are familiar with. Her mother doesn't just shop in Wells Avenue because of the commodity, but because her mother *knows* the people in these businesses.

Geographers and planners understand that familiarity is a huge factor in providing a sense of place and home for Hispanic-Latino/a communities (Arreola, 2004; Rios & Vasquez, 2012). Julie expresses a similar, mixed-emotion sentiment, "My family's very like old school, so they don't adopt to change as easily as someone else, but I don't think they would perceive it as like bad per say" (Julie, 02/20/2023). Where it would be difficult for her family to adapt to change, Alicia echoes the idea that families will receive and accept

changes in different ways depending on their position in relation to Wells. In this case, class is highlighted, as Alicia describes the perceived impact of changes through the lens of her parents, who are homeowners.

My parents are homeowners there [surrounding neighborhood of Wells Avenue], and they have a couple of properties ... As property owners, you hope the value goes up, but then when I think about people that aren't homeowners ... their rents are gonna go up because it's a poor area ... So, it's bittersweet [change]. It's kind of hard to see for ... everyone else, because ... For us, it's good but not for a lot of people ... and we have a lot of friends and family that live around that area, and ... it's affordable rent around there, and it's just gonna keep going up, and ... It's just, you know, it's gonna affect other people too (Alicia, 12/29/2022).

Alicia and her family feel very conflicted around the change in Wells Avenue. Where they hope for change and property values to go up, they also are saddened for the community this affects around them. Alicia and her family's perception of this change varies because of their class, adding nuance to how gentrification affects Hispanic-Latino/a communities. Alicia's perspective gives an individual look into how cultural groups do not experience the effects of gentrification homogeneously. Challenges for family around change in Wells Avenue are also described around language, Daniela states:

I feel like ... my grandparents for sure [will feel the effects of change]. I feel like my parents [are] like kind of in between because they've adapted, they speak English. They were here since they were 19. So, I think they can adapt on both ends, but I think if we're talking about older generations that don't speak English, or even people like my parents who don't that's [change] hard I think that's hard for them (Daniela, 02/15/2023).

For Daniela, there is a fear that, if businesses change and their family has no language accessibility, they will be less able to access resources and services in Wells Avenue.

Particularly, for generations like her grandparents, Margaret shares this sentiment.

Language for sure is probably the biggest concern ... A Lot of Latino parents, like, older people need help doing ... certain tasks with electronics or something. They need help kind of going through like the process of ... certain day to day tasks. So, for that, you need someone who speaks Spanish ... or like ... someone to teach them how to do certain aspects of life. So, I feel like, in this area [Wells Avenue], there's a lot of people who do speak Spanish, so they're able to ... work through those barriers with them [Latino parents] (Margaret, 02/22/2023).

Margaret emphasizes the concern for older generations that many youth and young people carry. Class, age, and language ability are all key factors in understanding the different experiences of change. Thus, second generation young people, like Margaret, will inevitably have a different relationship to place-based change than their parents or grandparents. This sentiment also suggests that Wells Avenue is one of the only commercial spaces where their family can access linguistic needs.

For those whose families are directly involved in business, the changes are not 'all bad.' One participant, James, who has been in Reno since he was a young child and whose parents own their own business in Reno, expresses a positive view of change for businesses through the perspective of his family.

I can definitely see ... new businesses being nice ... I think ... obviously, with my parents, and a lot of my family owning small businesses, we're always welcome to new small businesses opening up because ... it's just nice to see the small business community grow (James, 12/06/2022).

For James, change in businesses in the Wells Avenue commercial space is welcomed. He and his family have been part of a small business for a while, and they would like to see growth in the commercial area with new businesses. Margaret also expresses a similar sentiment but focuses more on the safety of the Wells Avenue commercial space.

I think, as far as ... my family I think they feel ... it's a good thing [change in Wells Avenue] ... It's [Wells Avenue] been kind of like a rundown area for a while, and since they're trying to, ... make it ... more modern and ... inviting for

people to come down here. They'd be ... pretty happy that it's ... getting revived (Margaret, 02/22/2023).

For Margaret and their family, safety and aesthetics play a role in how they and their family perceive change in the Wells Avenue commercial space. Gentrification, in this case, is playing a role in creating a safer and cleaner environment for Wells Avenue that may be more attractive to families who avoided Wells for safety reasons.

Discussions of gentrification often mixed with those of COVID-19 as an equally important force of change within individual and familial relations with the Wells Avenue commercial space (see previous section). For many of the participants, the COVID-19 pandemic affected their families' ability to feel safe or comfortable with change in Wells Avenue. Where all people experienced the effects of the pandemic, participants expressed that it sparked a fear that there would be further inaccessibility to needs. Edith explains her family's experience through the pandemic.

I think COVID did put a strain on ... being able to access things and ... I'm using ... my parents experience as an example, but they were ... shocked when they had to go to the Marketon, and they had to wear a mask ... So, it's ... I think it was probably the uncertainty of ... what's going to happen? ... They were only letting a certain amount of people in stores or businesses [in Wells Avenue], and I definitely think it brought about nerves and ... concern ... I don't think I was that impacted just because I feel like I knew ... what's happening ... whereas my parents were ... hesitant with certain things because of Covid (Edith, 03/07/2023).

Edith's parents through the pandemic express a major sentiment: concern and nerves not just about health and safety, but about change and concern for the future. Her parents were worried that stores they frequent quite often may close or might not be available after the pandemic. Edith touches on a sense of uncertainty for her and her family amid the pandemic.

This section outlined how many of my participants consider the effects of gentrification and COVID-19 in Wells Avenue through the lens of family. The sentiments shared by participants expressed both concern and hope about the change in Wells Avenue; where the change could potentially create a safer, cleaner, and economically fruitful commercial space, it could also disadvantage certain communities with increased costs, lack of resources, and lack of familiar businesses. My participants described potential concerns from their family members by eliciting various points about age, class, and first-generation issues versus second generation issues. Many of my participants (most identifying as second or third generation) would feel okay with the changes, but their parents or grandparents (most first generation) would not adjust or adapt to the change so quickly. As geographers like Valentine and Vanderbeck suggest, young people typically examine social, political, and economic processes through generational impacts (Valentine, 2019; Vanderbeck, 2007). Processes like gentrification and COVID-19, in my study, are thus generational issues where my participants *are* taking into consideration other experiences and interpretations of change in the Wells Avenue commercial space.

3. Young People in a Place of Change: Estrangement and Tension

Many of the participants have strong emotional connections to the Wells Avenue commercial space, but as young adults feel that they cannot *connect* to this place in the same way. This is a place of important childhood memory (see Chapter 4) yet is experienced differently at the stage of life now. Participants view this place through multiple temporal and familial lenses (Wood, 2015), as described in the previous section. Turning to their own personal relationship with Wells today, many expressed that they

have a conflicted relationship to the space today, one that is described as estranged. This is attributed to several factors: 1) they don't go out shopping as much with family as young adults, 2) they still feel a sense of unsafety, and 3) there are not many businesses or commercial spaces where they would want to frequent as young adults. To that end, as participants observe the current changes, many expressed that the new developments in Wells Avenue might encourage them to once again connect and belong in the Wells Avenue space.

This section highlights the varying and contradicting effects of gentrification on place for young people (Butcher & Dickens, 2016). While many participants see clear consequences of gentrification (see previous Section) for the Wells Avenue commercial space and the Hispanic-Latino/a community, there are changes occurring that intrigue participants and constitute part of the diverse responses to urban change (Doucet, 2009; Butcher & Dickens, 2016). At the same time, one's almost idyllic relationship to this space as a child translates differently to their view of this place as a young adult and second generation American, caught in a liminal place 'in-between' different culture. Some participants expressed that, while Wells Avenue holds sentimental value because of childhood memory, their relationship to Wells today is viewed through a lens of shame that has come with navigating a second-generation immigrant experience. For Daniela, the place of her childhood or the Wells of her parents' generation is not the Wells she experiences today. When Daniela described going back to Wells, she states:

I feel like I often avoid Wells, just because there's often a lot of shame in being Hispanic, and so sometimes, I guess I try to avoid feeling that shame (Daniela, 02/15/2023).

I just felt like I knew my parents had to do these things [come to Wells Avenue] because they ... were immigrants ... It's so hard to explain, I guess I see it as like they had to go through that [frequenting Wells Avenue], and maybe I don't (Daniela, 02/15/2023).

I just feel like this ... area [Wells Avenue] ... takes me back to ... humble beginnings, but ... low expectations [for immigrant and Hispanic-Latino/a community] (Daniela, 02/15/2023).

Daniela's history with Wells heavily influences her opinions on Wells Avenue today.

Daniela expresses that Wells Avenue has been a place where there are low expectations for immigrant and Hispanic-Latino/a communities. These low expectations are the idea that an individual or family just does what it takes to survive versus having agency, power, and control over their desires and expectations for the future. Daniela believes that there is the possibility of impactful futures for Hispanic-Latino/a immigrant communities. Where the Wells of her childhood was an important commercial center for the community to connect and access their needs, the Wells of today is an "othered" space. As a young adult, she is deeply aware of how immigrant and Hispanic-Latino/a communities and identities are 'othered' in the American landscape. Wells today is a reminder of that. When describing if she would come back to frequent the businesses, Daniela states:

I feel like if my parents were like, let's go here, or let's go there. I'd be like, okay, because I feel protected by my parents. You know, I feel like this is my parents' choice. I'm just coming along, because I want to be with my parents, but if it's just me, I'm like, like eh (Daniela, 02/15/2023).

Daniela feels like Wells Avenue is a commercial space for her family and her in the context of her family, but not a space for her as a young Latina. However, Daniela also describes how some of the newer businesses have neutralized the "otherness" she associates with Wells Avenue.

I can feel there's a lot of ... of ... neutral businesses ... like this clothing store [Zozobee Competition Suits], the concrete company, ... a tattoo shop [Outlast Tattoo] or a beauty salon [Q Corona Beauty Salon] ... things you don't think about. But down there [South of Broadway Boulevard] I feel like it's more focused on the Hispanic community - which is awesome ... like we need that, but ... I guess to say ... Do I need that? No, I'm okay. (Daniela, 02/15/2023).

Daniela describes the mixture of businesses in Wells today produce a more inclusive environment that is not only meant for Hispanic-Latino/a communities but a range of communities. In Daniela's experience, these new commercial spaces produce open ground for her to inscribe a new meaning and narrative in space. Kate also shares hesitancy with wanting to frequent the Wells Avenue commercial space for safety concerns. She states:

It's not a place that you'd want to walk down alone [Wells Avenue] ... At least in this space, you're still connected to a good amount of housing, that is for low income ... more of an affordable place to live. So obviously, the people that are surrounding the street itself, may not be as ... as knowledgeable about certain places or tidiness and stuff like that ... we've passed by a lot of the places here, you see graffiti on the walls and tagging... There was one like under the umbrella over there, where you'll see ... tagging (Kate, 03/03/2023).

Kate is concerned that the streets are still unsafe in Wells Avenue, considering there is still a good amount of low-income housing and gang tagging around the commercial area. She suspects this area may not be the safest to be alone in. Margaret makes a similar statement about Wells Avenue not being a space where they would want to walk alone in.

I feel like it's not like the best area [Wells Avenue], but it's not like the worst area? - I would probably say ... they have a lot of things to offer for the community, like, program assistance ... an affordable grocery store [Marketon] ... but it's like not the safest area to go alone (Margaret, 02/22/2023).



Image 7. Taken by Margaret of Marketon

Margaret shares a mixture of feelings as to why they don't really use the commercial space. While Wells Avenue does offer resources and cultural access through Marketon, it is also considered an unsafe space emotionally and physically for them which impedes their desire to return or visit. For the most part participants are with family when they do come. Michael states

I frequent the Antojitos shop pretty often, and I frequent the restaurants around here every now and then with my family. So, it definitely does feel like a place where ... we connect ... I don't know, it just feels familiar. You know, it's a nice place for my family and I to visit, but other than that, I would say those are the primary reasons I stop by Wells ... basically ... to spend time with my family and connect (Michael, 02/20/2023).

Michael expresses that the only reasons for him to go to Wells Avenue is to spend time with family and eat food and connect with each other. As an independent young adult, the

space is less attractive, and as participants have aged, they also engage less with Wells

Avenue. Edith shares:

As I got more independent, I feel like I've kind of lost track of what's happened on Wells. ... Because now there's so many other places like the Reno Coffee Co, and other little things ... La Milagrosa is no longer there ... it's across the street now [it used to be in Reno Coffee Company] (Edith, 03/07/2023).

Sadly, I don't use it as much [Wells Avenue]. Yeah, I guess if I ever do ... for instance, ... if I am craving corn ... I will go to Antojitos, but I don't think it's ever beyond that. Also, ... on the weekends, they have food trucks ... that come here. So, I know for sure ... if I'm craving tacos ... I could come here, and ... I know they will never disappoint. I have really good food options here, but I don't think it goes beyond that. As of lately, as an adult, I don't see myself really coming here anymore. I did, up until recently ... I used to go to the HOC Clinic [Community Health Alliance] and ... I just went there, because that's where my primary care doctor was, but now that I'm older, and I have my own insurance ... I moved away from it. So, a lot of the things that I used to know here, I've expanded and gone ... to different ... like clinics and ... if I do need ... specific services, ... I think I have a better handle on where I could go (Edith, 03/07/2023).



Image 8. Taken by Edith of La Milagrosa

Edith shares that while she occasionally uses the Wells Avenue commercial space for eateries, she no longer uses the commercial and service landscape for prior uses, such as health care. As a young adult, she is building a network of resources outside of Wells.

Others attribute a lack of social engagement within Wells Avenue as youth to the historic and perceived lack of spaces for their generation. There is a sense that Wells Avenue is still very much a ‘family’ space or for older, Hispanic-Latino/a generations. Margaret states:

That's ... part of ... the whole gentrification thing ... if there were more things for young people to do down here, then ... I would probably come down here more, but because it, it doesn't really offer that it's ... harder to come down here for ... a normal day (Margaret, 02/22/2023).

For Margaret, the process of gentrification in Wells Avenue is and potentially can create a commercial landscape for young people. When asked if she would bring people to Wells Avenue, Nayeli shared:

It depends who they are. If they're ... Hispanic, probably, I'm like let's go to Anna's Taqueria or let's go if we need some food ... to Marketon, you know? But I mean, personally, I wouldn't take anyone here right now ... I feel like ... things are hidden. Like you said, you lived here [referring to me] but you didn't see little spots. I feel like until you really walk the streets you ... you ... don't notice the little spots (Nayeli, 02/10/2023).



Image 9. Taken by Nayeli of Anna's Taqueria

Nayeli expresses that it is difficult to go to Wells Avenue because businesses are not advertised very well. While Nayeli knows of some of the commercial spaces in Wells, it would be difficult to come with somebody less familiar because of how 'hidden' and unadvertised these businesses can be. She also expresses that she would only bring someone who is Hispanic to Wells Avenue, suggesting that this commercial space is not entirely inclusive of all types of communities. Kate also shares: "Maybe if there were more places that served certain communities ... I'd be willing to volunteer for stuff like that, but in terms of coming here more often, I don't think I would" (Kate, 03/03/2023). Kate shares that she only would come to Wells Avenue to support different service-based events, like health, housing, or immigrant resources. Kate's perspective of Wells Avenue

as an unsafe space still lingers today, but she does express that if community events were to happen, she would be likely to spend more time in Wells Avenue.

4. “Bittersweet” Change

This last section unpacks and reiterates the mixed emotions that many of the participants bring to material change in the Wells Avenue commercial space. This section highlights the ‘youth position’ – where temporal (Wood, 2015), intergenerational (Valentine, 2019; Vanderbeck, 2007), and paradoxical imaginaries (Butcher & Dickens, 2016) come into understanding dynamic space and place. These views are uniquely positioned through the experiences of my participants. While many can lament what is lacking for young Hispanic-Latino/as, they are also considering the changes in the context of what the space might be in the future and how the future will change the meaning of commercial and communal spaces they know from their past. The changing and future District may not be only a Hispanic-Latino/a space as many have described and known Wells Avenue. It may incorporate different communities and businesses, and that is described by participants as ‘bittersweet’. When talking about some of the effects of gentrification, Michael shares:

You know, I think expansion should always be exciting, but I think, unfortunately, expansion is not always exciting, because of ... like gentrification, you know, it's like, oh, God ... are more people going to be drawn here, and then there's going to be a thing where, you know, the town or city, whoever decides ... let's prioritize ... getting as many people it's not even that it's like, let's prioritize the profits over the experience, you know. So, I'm hoping that it expands, ideally, it would expand, and we would have even more diversity down here. But it's always scary to think that we could expand, and we could lose some touch of authenticity (Michael, 02/20/2023)

Michael indicates there is a direct fear that Wells Avenue could turn into a space which prioritizes profit over experience. Losing experience, diversity, and authenticity would be

sad to see for Michael, and he believes that it would profoundly change the commercial space. Michael still holds out hope that through gentrification and change in Wells Avenue, there could be more diversity. As many of the memories and experiences that participants share in this commercial space influence how they want to see this space change, these young people are experiencing a mixture and almost paradoxical range of emotions where they are reminiscent on the past, but hopeful for the future (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Doucet, 2009). Alicia states:

It's just crazy having all these new things open up here [Wells Avenue]. They are just going to gentrify, and I've seen it happen, and it's such a weird feeling. Like I said, the only word I could use to describe my feelings ... is *bittersweet*. Yeah, because it's like me as a young person, I want our community to grow, but it's also like, I hope that it can stay affordable ... but I know that's probably not the reality. So, I don't know. It's hard, it's hard (Alicia, 12/29/2023).

Alicia expresses that as a young person she wants to see the Wells space grow and develop, but she simultaneously empathizes for what will be lost in the space. This feeling is explicitly evoked by the process of gentrification and increased costs. Maria also expresses that change in Wells Avenue can be very confusing, whilst also being exciting.

I think it's something to adjust to [change in Wells Avenue]. Because it almost feels like your space is being invaded, and I think everybody [new businesses] who has moved into Wells Street has been super ... nice and super accepting of the other shops that are already here. So, I think that's really cool. For example, the coffee shop that's down here, the Reno Coffee Company ... that one was downtown, and then they moved over here, and the owner is super cool ... Very chill, very welcoming to ... anybody, and I love that. I love that there's still that inclusion (Maria, 11/17/2022).

Maria holds a similar feeling to Alicia: while the change in Wells Avenue is an adjustment, there are also new businesses opening that respect the older businesses. This doesn't nullify that she feels like her 'space is being invaded,' but exemplifies the idea

that new businesses can coexist *with* older, established Hispanic-Latino/a businesses.

Maria desires businesses which embrace the new and the old in this commercial space.

Margaret also states:

I would say it's a little bit of both [change in Wells Avenue] like it's positive because it's good that it's ... changing, so it's more accessible to more people. But it's also like taking away. Yeah, it's like making it a little bit less accessible for people that are used to being in this area, I would say, because ... in Midtown, like downtown ... there's ... homeless people, getting swept out. So, I feel like that would happen here. So eventually it will change [Wells Avenue] to be something like Midtown, where it wouldn't be as welcoming for people to like, stay here or like, walk around freely (Margaret, 02/22/2023).

Margaret believes that change throughout Wells could be positive for the Hispanic-Latino/a community, and other communities as well, to feel welcomed and included, but also is likely to sweep out current communities. This quote helps to understand how Margaret interprets patterns of gentrification in the commercial space: through patterns that 'sweep' people away - marginalized communities. Margaret directly relates the change occurring in Wells Avenue to the change that has displaced communities in Midtown (the adjacent neighborhood). This change in Wells Avenue could swing either way when it comes to community accessibility. While almost all the participants expressed a mixture of emotions when it comes to change in Wells Avenue, they equally accept the fact that change is 'inevitable' in a sense and does not have to undermine the Hispanic-Latino/a presence. In their acceptance of change, they allude to a future community that can be more inclusive and accessible for young people and other cultures. The next Chapter explores in more depth the hopes and desires young people bring to the future of Wells Avenue.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates how young adults interpret the Wells Avenue commercial space today. Where many of the participants think of Wells Avenue as a memorial landscape, this informs their bittersweet emotions around its change. Through the work of Doucet, we understand processes like gentrification are nuanced and contested (Doucet, 2009). His study found there were very neutral viewpoints on the effects of gentrification: his participants believed that gentrification is a process which may eventually displace the community but is still something these young people can be excited or hopeful for (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Doucet, 2009). Many participants shared that gentrification occurring in Wells Avenue incited multiple emotions. While gentrification offers benefit for them individually as young adults, it also potentially disrupts or threatens culture and community, particularly for their families in the Wells Avenue commercial space. Doucet found in his study that there were no direct effects of displacement on individuals experiencing gentrification, but there were indirect pressures and accommodations that had to be made (Doucet, 2009). This study found explicit implications on the process for the interviewee, their families, and the community. Another aspect to the youth narrative is the dismantling of the binary or traditional perceptions around processes like gentrification: conceptions that this process is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (Massey, 1994; Wood, 2015). Youth complicate understandings around neighborhood change through their temporal and intergenerational lenses (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Vanderbeck, 2007; Wood, 2015). The literature on gentrification and urban change is often read through a “positive” *or* “negative” binary that pits an all-powerful economic force against a powerless and/or resistant community, whereas participants recognize that both can exist simultaneously in a *bittersweet* relationship.

Similarly, through the work of Knieriem, gentrification is seen as a dynamic term which begs further individual understanding (Knieriem, 2023). This term, analyzed by my participants, revealed that understanding gentrification through the individuals involved exemplified how alternative usages and meanings can be ascribed to such a dynamic term. Gentrification is ambiguous and must be understood by those involved through and within the process (Knieriem, 2023). The participants acknowledged the ways that gentrification assimilates cultures and community, but also desired the ways that they may be able to engage and *belong* in the commercial space as young people. This chapter, thus, challenges the dichotomous thinking present in the gentrification literature by focusing on the ordinary experience of individuals.

Chapter 6

Imagining the Future: A Diverse, Inclusive, and Accessible Wells Avenue

This chapter focuses on how young people envision the future of Wells Avenue. The future as imagined by the participants is not severed from the past but shaped by their concern for family and community as well as their own desires and needs as young people. Chapter 4 focused on the memories, familial ties, and cultural connections the participants share in Wells Avenue, showing participants have place-based ties to this commercial space through their family. Chapter 5 focused on how my participants understood changes in the Wells Avenue commercial space today, how they understood and interpreted perceived gentrification, and their mixed emotions around change in the commercial space. These express a mixture of emotions about what they perceive to be the negative impacts of place change through gentrification and pandemic challenges, but they also see how change can facilitate inclusive community spaces and spots for young people. The out of their childhood memories and conflicted feelings in the present, they imagine a different future for the Wells Avenue commercial space. Young people sit at a nexus of past and future (Wood, 2015). As young people imagine or envision the future of space and place, they couple it with their histories and memories, to add variation and experience to the future of space and place attachment (Hamilton-Mckenna & Rogers, 2021; Wood, 2015). While so much space and place are being imagined *for* young people in the form of urban change and business tactics (Butcher & Dickens, 2016), this section shares participants' vision for the Wells commercial space in their own words. Massey writes, “the nature of links made, in the construction of notions of the identity of place, between past, present, and future [become important]. The identity of places is very much

bound up with the *histories* which are told of them, *how* those histories are told, and which history turns out to be dominant” (Massey, 1995, p. 186). So, as young people imagine the future, it encompasses many narratives and identities informed by their past and associations with space and place (Butcher & Harris, 2010; Massey, 1995).

The following sections explore the future of Wells Avenue as imagined by my participants. First, participants are imagining a new kind of community for Wells Avenue, one that does not reject the past but draws from the past to create a more inclusive and multicultural future, reflected in and supported by businesses. Second, they desire to see new and old businesses create an inclusive commercial space for all: one that holds events and provides resources for Hispanic-Latino/a community members as well. Third, participants see businesses as the ‘glue’ for the future of Wells Avenue as a multicultural and inclusive commercial space. Fourth, my participants desire a commercial space they can engage with and have businesses they’d like to go to. Lastly, my participants, throughout the walking interview, began to engage with Wells Avenue and expressed a desire to come back or go into a store. There was an active creation of place by participants during the research process. The future of Wells Avenue is happening now through these young adults.

1. The Future is Multicultural

Many participants describe Wells Avenue as a space full of possibility. Since the 1990’s, Wells Avenue has been identified by the broader Reno-Sparks as well a “Latino” space (Berry, 2004). For participants, that identity is changing, and many participants find that there is value in diversification of this place from their own experiences. For them,

the future of Wells is diverse and will include people from all communities. When describing Wells Avenue, Cristiano states:

Yeah, Wells has multiple uses, and, you know, it's not only geared towards people in Mexico and people in Central America or people in Europe [White populations], you know, it's like, we offer so many cool things that everyone of all ethnicities and races can enjoy (Cristiano, 02/16/2023).

The community wants to maintain this multicultural space, which Wells has embodied, and this is also exemplified in Chapter 4 through the regionalism section. Cristiano sees Wells as a multicultural space in the past, present, and future. Michael also states:

If we're talking about Hispanics here in Wells ... I would love to see that [diversity] all across the board...for example...when I was taking a nutrition class at UNR, we were talking about African culture, and ... what that looks like here in Reno, and I was like, geez, I can't think of anything ... and there was one student who was like ... there's one place in town that serves Ethiopian food ... I was like, god ... that sucks, I would hope that we [community] would expand and diversify [in Wells], because that makes the rest of us ignorant to African culture. ...I would love to ... expand my knowledge and get to know other cultures and connect to other cultures ... I would love to see that for everyone here [Wells Avenue] ... the Asian community, African American community, Latinas ... a space ...sort of like the Reno Public Market...where there's a lot of cultures mixing and mingling ... that isn't predominantly white (Michael, 02/20/2023).

Michael's sentiment highlights one of his own experiences in his classes, which made him desire a future which embraces many cultures in Wells Avenue and Reno, NV. For Michael, the diverse past of Wells lends itself to a diverse future, one that is not "predominantly White" but a collection of cultures mixing. He points to the Reno Public Market as an example of a place where different kinds of people and cuisines can mix. The Reno Public Market is also seen as a commercial space in Wells Avenue which is part of gentrification (see chapter 5). This contested commercial space, in the lens of Michael, is a new cultural commercial space which embraces and strengthens the cultural diversity in Wells Avenue.

Furthermore, Margaret reflects on how the current political climate is changing attitudes towards diversity in the city and how gentrification can be a pathway for bringing more cultural representation to Wells.

I feel like in this day and age - it probably wouldn't have been the same [cultural acceptance] ...before Trump's presidency -but more people are open to the Hispanic community. Sometimes ... you have people that are not very friendly, but I feel like more people are open to trying different things from different cultures. So having ... more gentrification would bring ... other cultures into this area [Wells Avenue] (Margaret, 02/22/2023).

Margaret imagines the future of Wells Avenue through the political past, where acceptance of cultures and community may not have existed in previous years. She says that today new changes and growing acceptance will invite many cultures into this commercial space. Margaret implies a growing acceptance of different cultures and communities in Wells Avenue and even Reno-Sparks, is happening. Through processes like gentrification, different communities and individuals can engage in different cultures. Alongside the hopes for what gentrification can bring, deep concerns over what will be lost exist at the same time, like the ‘bittersweet’ tension of change as expressed in Chapter 5. Nayeli expresses that Wells Avenue and Reno-Sparks could do much better in the future for connecting different communities and cultures. She states:

I feel like it, I don't know I feel it could do so much better [Wells Avenue and City of Reno]. It could do a lot better ... because it just stays in one area [Hispanic-Latino/a culture]. So, I think we could do a lot better, especially for a place like this [Wells Avenue] that has a lot of Hispanics ... Reno has a big Latino culture, and I feel like [Reno] could do so much better at celebrating and bringing them a part of the community (Nayeli, 02/10/2023).

Nayeli expresses that there doesn't need to just be a single enclave which embodies Hispanic-Latino/a culture, but the city itself should be in celebration of the culture and communities which make up the population. The city, like Wells Avenue, is multicultural.

Nayeli hopes that the city would come together to celebrate and connect cultures and communities. This sentiment was shared among many participants, that there is a slow growing acceptance of Hispanic-Latino/a culture that will allow for more Hispanic-Latino/a places around town and allow the community to feel like they belong. Places like Neil Road, Oddie Boulevard, North Reno, and Greenbrae are spaces where they feel a strong Hispanic-Latino/a presence as well.

This section examines how participants desire a space which is multicultural. Where Wells Avenue has long been culturally diverse (chapter 4), many participants believe that this commercial space is a perfect location for more diversity. Through their own histories and experiences, multicultural spaces are deeply valued. Sociologist Anita Harris explains that multicultural spaces and places are not just where diversity exists but are spaces where cultural differences can be deconstructed and acknowledged through youth engagement (Harris, 2009). Young people are constantly engaging in multicultural spaces and conversations (Butcher & Harris, 2010; Harris, 2009). This is exemplified through my own participants' experiences and desires for the future of the Wells Avenue commercial space. Many hope that gentrification and growth in Hispanic-Latino/a presence can influence desires and constructions of multicultural commercial spaces.

2. Events, Resources, and Businesses for Hispanic-Latino/a Families

The wish of participants for a more multicultural Wells Avenue does not negate their desires to also see more Latino-oriented activities in the form of community and family cultural events. Many participants observed a pause in community events, gatherings, and traditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. While some events remain, participants desire more *for* the community in terms of affordable hosting and resources.

Through the work of Rios & Vasquez, commercial spaces are important sites of Hispanic-Latino/a collective identity and communal gathering (Rios & Vasquez, 2012). They state, “Latino communities use the physical landscape- neighborhoods, commercial corridors, parks, and residential sites- as a vehicle to *produce* place” (Rios & Vasquez, 2012, p. 9). There is a desire by the Hispanic-Latino/a communities to have space to come together in (Rios & Vasquez, 2012). While some participants do not frequent Wells Avenue regularly in the present (see chapter 5), they say that more cultural events would bring them back. For example, James, who has not spent much time in Wells Avenue because he does not need to, states:

I definitely do hope that we [Hispanic-Latino/a community] can ... grow closer to communities where ... we see festivals or something ... somewhere in town. Because like I see that ... when... I have gone to Mexico ... It's nice seeing those festivals going on. I remember, we'd sometimes go to Mexico ... to where my mom was raised ... and they'd always be throwing ... festivals everywhere during Christmas time, and ... it'd be nice to see them like, adopt something like that here in Reno. So ... it brings some of the Latino community closer (Michael, 12/06/2022).

James has experiences with other cultures in other places, and it influences the way that he would like to see the community grow, not just in Wells Avenue, but citywide.

According to James, more festivals and events would allow the community to grow closer together and have a space to share. Margaret also shares:

I think it would be cool to have a place where the Hispanic community can ... do their events down here [that is] affordable ... As far as I know, Greenbrae has, an area where a lot the Latino community will do their quinceañeras and weddings, and I feel like if they had something to offer here [Wells Avenue] that was affordable for the community, it would bring more of that culture here, and allow more people [to come to] Wells for their, family purposes (Margaret, 02/22/2023).

Margaret shares that there are other places in Reno-Sparks which host Hispanic-Latino/a events and are affordable for the community. They suggest that if Wells Avenue were to

have a similar venue it would bring more events, culture, and community into this commercial space. Edith also states in a separate quote that these events would be great for her mother.

I think that's the attraction [events] ... places where people can get together ... I'm sure if I brought my mom to something like an event ... she'd love it, because she'd be able to see ... folks from ... the communities ... that are still here, and ... venture out and see, ... what else is out there ... and just like in Mexico, there's a lot of like, celebrations and ... ways of getting people together, and I really think that's what the Hispanic culture is, it is getting people to gather and share and like ... relationship building ... is what it comes down to ... being able to go to an event, and be like ... I was able to talk to this person who's going to help me file my taxes or whatever ... something ... as simple as that really is ... so impactful (Edith, 03/07/2023).

These events are not just big parties for the community but are cultural gatherings for the community to know one another and help each other engage in resources they may not otherwise know about. Edith explains that Wells Avenue needs more services and resources for Hispanic-Latinos/as to connect and get support. Resources also came up in relation to schools, Cristiano shares:

I would definitely like to see schools around here. See a remodeling of those schools. I know we're building more schools in the South side of Reno and the North side, but I feel like we're [community/city] ignoring the central area, and I feel like if we really focus and pay attention to the community around here and offer better school supplies and better education, you can have more opportunity for growth, specifically in this area [Wells Avenue] (Cristiano, 02/16/2023).

Cristiano's comment does not just speak to his own desires but speaks to the unevenness of municipal and county resources for education. For Cristiano, resources are directed to the relatively wealthier areas (North and South Reno). It is through improving the schools that the community and commercial space itself can grow around Wells Avenue and central Reno.

This section gets at my participants' personal desire to see more resources and events hosted for the Hispanic-Latino/a community. While new businesses and opportunities for multiculturalism and diversity are showing up in Wells Avenue post-COVID, there is still an erosion of community that lingers through Hispanic-Latino/a networks. Changes in Wells Avenue are not all beneficial (as examined in Chapter 5) but elicit serious concerns that my participants share about access for the Hispanic-Latino/a community. This is exemplified through my participants' desires and observations in the greater Reno-Sparks area. Resources can be key to successful development and connection (Arreola, 2004).

3. Businesses as Glue for the Future of Wells

While the participants are imagining the future of the Wells Avenue space, they acknowledge the role of businesses in sustaining the Hispanic-Latino/a identity of Wells and facilitating the multicultural identity of the future. Since the 1990's, businesses along Wells Avenue have represented the interests and needs of the Hispanic-Latino/a community (Palma & Ocampo, 2021). Even throughout Chapter 4, many participants describe how some of the businesses supported their families' cultural needs. Participants later elaborated on how they desire to see businesses in Wells for the future of the commercial space. Daniela states,

I guess I would like it to stay the same [Wells Avenue]. You know? I think some change can always be good, but I think that when it's overboard, it kind of takes away from the character of the place, I think that's when it's damaging. So, I would hope that they [businesses] keep it kind of the same (Daniela, 02/15/2023).

Daniela believes that changing the Wells Avenue space drastically would really take away the character that the commercial space has built. She also believes that it is the job of the businesses to support character sustainment. While the change occurring in this

commercial space can be good, maintaining character through business support is what is desired by her. More on the idea of growth, Cristiano shares how he and his family would feel about change in some of the businesses. “We'd love to see it change [Wells Avenue]. We are a big supporter of Latino businesses, and we'd love to see the growth” (Cristiano, 02/16/2023). Cristiano has been in Reno since he was a young child and has watched a lot of change occur as he has gotten older. Cristiano uses the term growth as a part of the change for Wells Avenue. Where he and his family are in support of change in the commercial space, growth through Hispanic-Latino/a businesses is desirable. Erika also speaks more about her desire to see to the area grow with Hispanic-Latino/a businesses:

I would like Latino stores to pop up here more. I'm trying to think of what we have in Vegas that we don't have here, but not necessarily on Wells but maybe in Reno because there's only one Marketon, and this is the only ... marketplace that I see that there's for Hispanics here in Reno - not really a lot of places (Erika, 02/18/2023).

While Erika has only been in Reno for a couple years, she already notices that there are not many Hispanic-Latino/a markets like there are in Las Vegas. Erika would like to see more access for the Hispanic-Latino/a community in Reno when it comes to cultural businesses. Julie also shares how she would like to see the Wells Avenue commercial space change. Since Julie has been in Reno most of her life, she speaks to some of the needs of the community. “I think having ... more Latino owned businesses ... is a really big part of growing this community [Hispanic-Latino/a community]” (Julie, 02/20/2023). Having more businesses which can support the Hispanic-Latino/a community is not just needed for accessibility, but to help the community grow in Wells Avenue. The Hispanic-Latino/a businesses in Wells Avenue are not just spaces of commodity, but they are

spaces where people grow in community and connection to one another (also expressed in Chapter 4).

As for some of the change and newer businesses coming into the Wells Avenue commercial space (as inspired by change in Midtown), participants hope that different and new businesses will complement the culture and community Wells has built for itself.

Michael states:

Yes, I would hope that it doesn't take from Wells [growth/change in Midtown], I would hope that it almost complements Wells ... if you get exposed to something, whether it's here on Plumb, that you continue to seek things similar to that, right, and so I would hope that it would draw you to either the two places and not necessarily take customers from either, and also hopefully not affect the Latinos living in nearby areas as well (Michael, 02/20/2023).

Michael expresses that change is good, and he does encourage it, but he also hopes that it would not take away from what is already in Wells: that the two spaces could have a reciprocal relationship. Margaret states a similar sentiment, “Yeah, so I would say it's important to keep its original, like, community here, but also like working to improve it so that more people can enjoy it” (Margaret, 02/22/2023). There is something integral in maintaining the established communities and businesses for the change of Wells Avenue, but change will simultaneously allow other communities and individuals to enjoy the Wells Avenue space (see above section on multiculturalism). The Hispanic-Latino/a businesses in Wells Avenue are also expected to help clean up the commercial space alongside newer businesses. Nayeli states,

I think it's super important [Wells Avenue] because it's like a place that is ... known for it being a Hispanic location. So, for more Hispanics to bring business here, I feel like that'd be wonderful, just because it's the place ... and what I'm seeing ... they're kind of cleaning it up more and making it a little bit more safe, and it'd be nice to see ... more of our communities just walking around ...and going place to place to eat (Nayeli, 02/10/2023).

Nayeli is commenting on how the businesses in Wells are creating a new aesthetic which is contributing to the safety of the space, a safety which did not exist in the past. Wells Avenue is now, and is *becoming* a place that she, her family, and community would feel safe in. Similar sentiment is made through Chapter 5, where my participants are reflecting on how investment is being made in the community, now that it is no longer a solely Hispanic-Latino/a space. While change in Wells Avenue is predominantly welcomed by participants, there is an unevenness of the change and resources being allocated in the commercial space.

This section emphasizes the need of established Hispanic-Latino/a businesses and new businesses to embrace cultural diversity, keeping the established community and character of the Wells Avenue commercial space. These businesses have played a huge role in many of my participants' upbringings (Chapter 4) and many of them desire to see these businesses, along with new businesses in the Wells commercial space, supporting the community. Urbanist Jesus Lara describes how ethnic businesses and established commercial spaces can play a role in the support networks, social structure, and sense of belonging for Hispanic-Latino/a communities (Lara, 2018). These commercial businesses are sites where the community can come together and support each other's needs (Arreola, 1993; Lara, 2018). When the participants are imagining the future of the Wells commercial space, it must stay connected to the character, community, and culture of its past.

4. A Wells for Young People

Whereas childhood memories and ongoing concern for family and community center strongly in sentiments around change in Wells Avenue, participants are also always

imagining Wells through the unique perspective of youth. From this, other needs and desires take shape. This is part of the relational and intergenerational youth lens that considers both family and individual interests when thinking about who a space serves, and these things can be contradictory (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Hamilton-Mckenna & Rogers, 2021). For my participants this looks like bars, eateries, and LGBT spaces. Through the addition of some of these types of businesses, they would be more enticed to visit Wells Avenue. Many describe the changes as influenced by changes in Midtown and directly oriented towards a youth clientele. Alicia states:



Image 10. Taken by Alicia of ‘Hispanic-Latino/a’ area of Wells Avenue

Once Midtown started growing, I ... started seeing it leach out into Wells. So now you see ... this coffee shop [Reno Coffee Company]. I was like, it's starting ... You see it happening and ... there's a new little ... plant shop down here. All this stuff! Like you, you see it leaching down into here [Wells Avenue]. It's very

different from when I grew up ... This would have been mainly a Mexican area. Now you see a lot more ... young people hanging around here. It's [new businesses] bringing a lot of younger people in here, because it was just families ... doing what they need to do on the street, and now it's like a hangout area, because it's right next to ... I want to say ... hipster Midtown (Alicia, 12/29/2023).

Alicia expressed that once Midtown started growing, that is when Wells Avenue began catering more to a younger demographic. With new businesses that she didn't grow up with, she understands this change has been influenced by the adjacent neighborhood, Midtown. Wells is no longer solely a 'Mexican' space or 'family' space, but it is becoming a 'hangout' space for young people. Similarly, Margaret states: "They [Wells Avenue] added the coffee shop [Reno Coffee Company] ... So, they're trying to make it more modern, which is cool, and I think that'll bring more young people into the area ... They also have a speakeasy bar [Wonder Bar] over here ... it's kind of cool" (Margaret, 02/22/2023). Margaret understands some of the new businesses in Wells are trying to cater to young people, which is 'cool' to them. It's nice for them to have new spaces to see and may be able to frequent them in the future. Margaret also states, "I see Wells as ...an area for ... there to be ...growth between communities – I would say ... because there is ... more modern places, like the coffee shop [Reno Coffee Company] ... so that brings in more of a young vibe, but there's still ... the older vibe here, where ... it's still ... more Latin based" (Margaret, 02/22/2023). What Margaret expresses is a mixture of community being embodied in Wells Avenue. While Wells Avenue is adding new businesses which would not have existed when they were growing up, today there is a mixture of communities happening. The older generation sustains the Hispanic-Latino/a culture, and the new business invites younger generations.

While the participants would almost all love to see this space grow with different styles of businesses, they maintain that seeing a mixture of the Hispanic-Latino/a culture with the ‘new’ culture is most desirable for them as young people. Nayeli shares,

I hope there's more business here. I mean, you see some empty buildings. I hope some people start to like, some more Hispanics bring in their business. Create a fun community. I mean, like, there's just so much room for so many cool businesses here that they can do. I'm gonna just keep it coming and hope you know, because you see a lot of coffee shops and you're like okay. They're like the coffee shops you'll find anywhere in Midtown, but like, like a Spanish a Hispanic version. I feel like that would be so fun, or like something like that, you know, something just more (Nayeli, 02/10/2023).

Nayeli envisions the future as new businesses and fun places to go or get coffee and eat, but with a cultural element. These businesses that she desires are businesses which maintain elements of the cultural past but can speak to the youth at present. Her desire is past, present, and future-focused. Michael also shares,

A space that opened up recently ... Reno Public Market... was something that I was caught off guard by because I didn't think the city would prioritize ... putting that many diverse options in there, but it was a pleasant surprise. You know, because ... there's a new Salvadorian restaurant in there, which is great ... So yeah ... a space like that, where we have all of ... these cultures sharing something in common, but they're also different in their own unique ways ... I think that's something that the Reno Public Market did a good job of creating, and that's something that I think people want to see. Like here as well [Wells Avenue] ... I think that's what they were aiming for [RPM], and I think I think they've done a good job (Michael, 02/20/2023)

Michael explains how the new development, Reno Public Market, is an example of the kind of commercial spaces he likes to see. A commercial space that is bringing together different cultures and communities, but creating something that young people want to go to. He expresses that seeing something like that explicitly in Wells Avenue would be something to aim for, and something the community would like to see.

There are many places in Wells Avenue already connecting participants back to the commercial space, but all this change is often compared to change in Midtown. While Midtown has places that many participants would frequent, they desire to see how Wells Avenue could change and embody the culture and character that is already present in the commercial space. This section highlights different businesses and commercial spaces which my participants see as drawing in ‘young’ generations. The commercial spaces are nice, and something that they, themselves, could look forward to for the future. Nevertheless, many of them still hope that these new businesses could couple with the Hispanic-Latino/a culture and character to create something unique and distinct for Wells Avenue.

5. Future Engagement: Active Creation of Place by Participants

Finally, I end this chapter with a reflection on how the research process facilitated new engagements with Wells that may resonate into the future. While many participants expressed positive memories and childhood connections to the Wells Avenue commercial space as described in Chapter 4, several felt that they no longer belonged in the landscape and did not have a desire to engage in the present. For eight of my participants, our walking interview was the first or one of a few times they had spent significant time in the district since before COVID-19, but what they found during our walks renewed some interest to reconnect. They reflected that, as this space changes to serve new communities and old communities, many participants noticed things as they were participating in the walking interview. For many participants, they had not been down Wells Avenue in a while, and the interview itself allowed them to engage in this space again. While it elicited memories and connection, there was an active engagement with place, and desire

to come back after the interview. This material engagement, elicited by the interviews, gave insight into the future of the participants' attachment and connection to the Wells Avenue space. This desire to be in the space is for the future, not only informed by their past, but also by their upbringing and their own identities as Hispanic-Latino/a and American. To begin, Daniela states,

I think seeing the older parts of ... Wells ... as compared ... the coffee shop [Reno Coffee Company] and the beauty salon [Q Corona Salon] ... I think it really resembles who I am. It's like, half of these American stores, and then half of these Hispanic stores. So, to me ... it's becoming neutralized where I can maybe come here later, and not feel like, of course, you're Hispanic hanging out at Wells. It's ... different people ... people with different backgrounds can come in (Daniela, 02/15/2023).

Daniela, who has had a contentious background with Wells Avenue (see Chapter 5), sees the change as an embodiment of who she is, and how she identifies. She is not just Hispanic-Latino/a nor just American, and so a mixture of businesses and identities more accurately represents her status. She explains the Wells Avenue commercial space as changing where she doesn't have to feel like an 'other' hanging out in Wells. There are different people coming with varying backgrounds. This exemplifies further how the process of research impacts participant outcomes. She also stated while we were walking:

I had eyed that coffee place for a while [Reno Coffee Company], because I always ... I have an appointment that way, and I'm always like, oh, this looks so cute. So yeah, I do think that it has intrigued me to come more often. Even going right now just walking by that store that has candles and oils and stuff [Reno Magick] ... I'm ... really into spirituality. So even now and taking the time to like, *see* Wells ... because I haven't in years. I feel like ... maybe I could come more often, like socially. (Daniela, 02/15/2023).

As the walking interviews began around Reno Coffee Company, Daniela expressed that this specific place has been on her mind for a bit, but through the walking interview or just coming back to the Wells Avenue space, she is sparked to potentially return. There

are new stores like Reno Magick which cater to her specific needs, spiritually. Nayeli also shares:

When we were walking over there [near Accesorios Ibanez] I heard some people speaking Spanish and that to me is super comforting, because I grew up in Hispanic households and ... it's your people and you feel comfortable, and I hear them and it's just like ... you don't feel like you're out of place (Nayeli, 02/10/2023).

As we were walking, Nayeli overheard two Spanish-speakers and that instantly connected her to the place: she felt comfortable and safe in Wells Avenue because it reminded her of her family and upbringing. It is comforting to hear these things though the commercial space is growing. Geographer Brian Godfrey explains how linguistic features allow an individual to create a sense of place and collective identity in commercial spaces (Godfrey, 2016). Arreola further explains Spanish language as the “glue that holds Hispanic/Latino populations together” (Arreola, 2004, p. 16). Language, for Nayeli, helps her feel comfortable and connected to Wells. As Cristiano expressed in Chapter 5:

It's insane like ... these ... crosswalks and streetlights we didn't have these before in Wells it was just this dark area where ... people got shot, people fought, people did drugs, ... it wasn't a safe area to begin with, but to really see it, you know do more ... make ... more acceptable to the whole population of Reno. It's nice to see that more people can feel comfortable walking down or jogging like that man who just passed down the street (Cristiano, 02/16/2023).

While there is recognition that Wells is receiving more financial investment and political attention now versus when it was just the ‘Latino neighborhood’ (see Chapter 5), that uneven allocation of resources across time does not preclude Cristiano from wanting to come here. His active engagement through the walking interviews shows him how this space has changed to become safer and more inhabitable.

Participants also reflected on the state of the commercial landscape post-pandemic. Julie states, “I think just walking down the street, like you see all the people

that are down here, in all the cars that kind of drive by and they see all these businesses and ... and say oh, why don't we stop and have lunch here, or something like that? So, I think that sense of community has started to come back a little bit" (Julie, 02/20/2023). There is a community and connection that is coming back that Julie notices by walking the streets. Frequenting these commercial spaces is a form of connecting to the community. Michael also expresses surprise at some of the businesses that remained open: "I thought that place [Asi es Mi Tierra] closed because of the pandemic. Yeah, I genuinely [did]. I totally forgot about that place until like a few months ago" (Michael, 02/20/2023). Michael said that he had forgotten about some of the businesses in Wells Avenue or thought due to the pandemic that they would have closed. Through his own recent engagement and participation in this study, he is reminded that these places are still open and existing for the community. Margaret also shares:

Yeah, during COVID, I remember my family would drive down here ... and everything was ... shut down ... nobody was out. It kind of just looked like a ghost town. So, I'm assuming a lot of like, the small businesses were really, really affected ... as we walk, you can see ... there's a lot of businesses that *have* closed down. So, I'm assuming that COVID was not like the best thing that happened to this area of town. But now post-COVID, there's some shops that are still open and ... there's more life down here. Lots of traffic, lots of people walking ... So, they probably were trying to recover from COVID (Margaret, 02/22/2023).

Margaret expresses the concern they and their family had during the pandemic about businesses staying open, and as we walked up and down Wells Avenue, they were able to see what was still open and what did not make it through the pandemic. Walking through Wells Avenue has allowed participants to engage with what the space is today, inform their memories of its previous demeanor, and imagine how they may be able to experience this space for the future. This research has served as an 'intervention' of sorts in addition to data collection opportunities. Relationships to place are being remembered

and negotiated in real time. The space of the interview was potentially changing one's future relationship with this commercial space.

This theme takes the memories and feelings of the young adult to capture and imagine how a dynamic landscape like Wells Avenue can best create an inclusive space of the future. The participants desire a future which embodies and embraces both past, present, and future; in this is a desire for a multicultural landscape, utilizing established businesses as a glue for the future of change, implementing more resources that the Hispanic-Latino/a community can access, and establishing places where *all* young people can belong and engage in. Many of my participants share how different identities and cultures coming together is what makes a place welcoming, inclusive, and desirable. Young people are re-envisioning space and place to capture the nuances of experiences and give a lens into a versatile future of space and place through their own identities and interpretations of space and place (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Hamilton-Mckenna & Rogers, 2021). This future is ideal and does not adhere to a fixed idea but encompasses many imaginaries and hopes for a culturally important space. As the participants imagined the future of Wells Avenue, they actively began to envision themselves in the landscape, and engaged with new spaces while walking. Through young adults there is a landscape which is inclusive, progressive, and ideal for all generations and communities (Butcher & Harris, 2010; Butcher & Dickens, 2016).

Conclusion

As these chapters have followed a sort of sequential manner, this chapter has understood how participants view Wells Avenue for the future. Many of these opinions and expressions are based on their upbringing, culture, or specific memories. This form

of attachment and sense of place is exemplified through some of the work in commercial identity and community building (Weller & Turkon, 2015; Rios & Vasquez, 2012).

Individuals often identify or imagine a place through the ways that they have experienced a place and how they culturally desire a place (Hayden, 1995; Rios & Vasquez, 2012; Steigemann, 2019; Zukin, 2012). This makes the future of space very much informed by the historical and recent past. For many participants they imagined what this space was while they were growing up and have a desire to see those same cultural Hispanic-Latino/a places beautify and maintain the community. Their memories serve as visions for the future. This future is not just fixed in one position (Massey, 1994). My participants desire to see multicultural spaces, multigenerational spaces, an embodiment of growth and remembrance for the Hispanic-Latino/a community in Wells Avenue.

These desires, while informed by everyone's experience and understanding of the Wells Avenue space, are also an embodiment of the youth or young person's perspective. Young people constantly imagine the future of a place (Hamilton-Mckenna & Rogers, 2021). While youth are imaging space, they are also aging and remembering, able to predict and imagine an inclusive and holistic future (Wood, 2015). This was extremely present in the expressions of my participants, where they all desire to see the space grow and develop while desiring to maintain the cultural roots and community which has made this space what it is today. My participants are not just fixed on what this space will become or what they want it to become, but they imagine this place for all: for their families, for different cultures and communities, for the Hispanic-Latino/a community, and for the businesses. This all-encompassing scope of the future is really imagined through the perspective and lens of the participants. For young people or young adults,

imagining the future of space is not stagnant, but constantly developing and a process of becoming (Rios & Vasquez, 2012), where many different perspectives and imaginaries are allowed to exist.

The perspectives of my participants shed a nuanced light on the space of Wells Avenue. While many believe there are effects of gentrification and the COVID-19 pandemic, these things do not define how the community and businesses will change and develop in place. They are already seeing symbols of their desires for this place through Anna's Taqueria and the Reno Public Market. While these symbols can be empirical evidence of such processes, they are described by participants as movements toward change and *growth* in the community. Their only hope is that it can remain true to the Hispanic-Latino/a culture which has long influenced and served the community. While this space has long been contested in culture and community (Palma & Ocampo, 2021), the narrative of the young person, the young adult, my participants, incorporates a vision which will include all communities, businesses, and desires. The experiences and interpretations of gentrification in the commercial setting for Hispanic-Latino/a young people implicates that more consideration of young people of color in terms of policy, intervention, and impact. Where young people of color are reimagining commercial change. There is no one way to grow, but there is a growth that can happen together by and through the community. This is the connected future of Wells Avenue.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Ultimately, this paper and investigation has sought to understand how Hispanic-Latino/a young adults experience, negotiate, and produce social connection, mutual identity, and a sense of place through engagement with the Wells Avenue commercial district in Reno, Nevada, in a gentrifying and post-COVID context. The Wells Avenue commercial district is a built site of Hispanic-Latino/a business, community making, identity making, and a cultural representation. This dynamic space is where many Hispanic-Latino/a communities go to get goods, but also to build social connections and a sense of place. By examining the young adult perceptions of space and place, a more complex, temporal, unfixed, and nuanced narrative is portrayed in understanding a sense of place and identity making within Wells Avenue.

The bodies of literature pulled for this research emphasize the work in youth geographies and focus on a sense of place and experiences of space and place among young adults. An emphasis of this work focuses on the agency and voice of marginalized and perceived passive recipients of geographic processes, like youth, immigrant communities, and communities of color. This focus brings another perspective to understanding commercial and urban change through the lenses of youth of color (Rios & Vasquez, 2012; Steigemann, 2019). Finally, I utilize work in urban geography on gentrification to better understand the process through the individual perception (Harvey, 1996; Smith, 2010). Notably, scholars like Doucet and Butcher and Dickens critiqued gentrification literature for its 'fixed' approach to interpreting the process (Butcher & Dickens, 2016; Doucet, 2009). This cross examination of different studies has illuminated

how commercial change can be understood and complicated by young people of color. Also, how commercial change reveals implications nationally for various communities experiencing the effects of gentrification (Hwang, 2016).

The goal of the Literature Review in Chapter 2 is to comprehend research of space and place through youth geographies, examine how communities on the margin have historically facilitated a sense of place and belonging in the urban and commercial space, understand gentrification through the lens of geographical work and new ways of interpreting the process itself, and how the youth narrative can be applied to deconstruct and reinterpret space and place through a temporal, intergenerational, and futuristic lens. A comprehensive look is given to youth geographies, sense of place, and feminist place theory with various geographers whose research covers a dynamic understanding of place as a *process* (Massey, 1994/2013; Valentine, 2010). This investigates how place is not passive in the background of everyday life, but constantly engaged, manipulated, and interpreted through individual practices and social connections (Evans, 2008; Kallio et al., 2016). Particularly, highlighting how young people or youth utilize agentic power to understand space and place around them (Skelton, 2010). This chapter further relates how commercial space is understood by communities of color and come to be affected by processes like gentrification (Harvey, 1996; Smith, 2002; Smith, 2010). This addresses the processes at work in space and place, and new ways of interpreting and understanding these through young people and communities of color (Doucet, 2009). Finally, this section reviews interpretations of space and place through the young person. This is where traditional narratives of interpreting space and place are complicated through the lens of the young person; which bring a temporal, intergenerational, and a paradoxical

approach to creating a sense of place and experiencing space and place (Harris, 2009; Vanderbeck, 2007). Youth Geographies reimagines space and place through their unique positioning in society and their dynamic relationship with space (Wood, 2015). Young people are very much providing an intersectional lens when it comes to space, place, and spatial processes (Crenshaw, 1989; Rodó-de-Zárate & Baylina, 2018). Reassessing and reimagining what space is; past, present, and future.

Chapter 3 was a focus on the methods applied to explore the memories, identities, and connections to places participants familiar with Wells Avenue express. The techniques used a multi-method qualitative approach including walking interviews and a photo activity. Semi-structured walking interviews allowed a deep and interactive understanding of lived experiences in the Wells Avenue commercial district (Macpherson, 2016; Riley & Holton, 2016). Where participants were able to engage in the commercial space directly and speak about any change or experiences, they had. Additionally, participants engaged in a photo activity which elicited visual understanding of the space and reflection on experiences and memories in place (Pink, 2007). For analysis, key words and statements were marked, categorized, and themed manually through an iterative process of organization. Identifying patterns across interviews were codified by response, revealing a unique position on spatial change and culturally significant space.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 related to the finalized themes and results from the collected data. This section emphasizes the major themes and supporting themes from the walking interview data and photo activity. The following major themes (along with themes in result chapters) were produced out of the data: Theme 1) The Historical and Cultural

Significance of the Commercial District, Theme 2) A Bittersweet Space, Theme 3) Imagining the Future. These themes present themselves in a sequential manner; where Theme 1 speaks to the lived memories and experiences participants share in Wells Avenue, Theme 2 exemplifies a tension and complexity to interpreting change in Wells Avenue *today* for participants, and Theme 3 imagines the future holistically and comprehensively through the lens of the participants. For Theme 1, Wells is historically a multicultural place connected through the community and businesses. There are many significant features and memories of Wells Avenue by participants through the commercial spaces. Their memories and experiences in Wells Avenue, while not always ‘nice’, exemplify the ways that my participants have connected to this space through family, business, and cultural connection. The second theme introduces the ‘bittersweet’ change occurring in Wells Avenue as presented by participants. Many participants perceive gentrification to be occurring in this commercial space, and there are contentious feelings towards the process. This feeling toward change is neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad,’ but participants are both hopeful and wishful that the changes happening serve the needs of the community and individuals who have been in Wells and those who are there today. They also desire for there to be a continuation of Hispanic-Latino/a business presence in the commercial space. The last theme shows the desires that participants have for the future of this commercial space. This future is connected to all communities and the history that sits in place. Wells is desired to be a commercial space that changes for the good of the community, and still maintains its cultural roots. Through mixed-businesses, youth and young adult spaces, resource accessibility, and cultural inclusion, my participants imagine an inclusive commercial space. These results suggest that many

interpretations of space and place can be understood by the young person. Where traditional narratives around change in the commercial space are binary and fixed (Doucet, 2009), the intersectional positionality that participants shared is mobile and inclusive to many narratives. This section reveals the connection that Hispanic-Latino/a young adults make to Wells Avenue through family and memory and their desire to see change in the commercial space more inclusively. Young people are direct lenses into the future of space and place, and obscure traditional narratives on how place is to be understood. I hope and propose this data will be utilized to understand how young people of color interpret and experience commercial spaces and places.

Suggestions for Future Research

This project shows the importance of the youth and young adult perspective in revealing *new* understandings and interpretations of commercial process, like gentrification. I suggest that a generational analysis of similar processes would support and investigate dynamic generational interpretations of space and place. Particularly, for Hispanic-Latino/a families and immigrant communities, a study which investigates spatial processes across generations within these communities could capture a holistic understanding of space and place for communities on the margin. Furthermore, policy makers, city planners, and businesses owners could use such findings in their work to conserve culture and community in commercial settings.

While this research was focused on the experiential and historical engagement with the Wells Avenue commercial space by young adults, there is also opportunity for work around what is gone and evaluating what businesses in communities of color have

closed. Across all cities it would be useful to create an index for what is gone in different communities of color or communities on the margin. As this work found that cultural businesses are paramount for Hispanic-Latino/a communities, it would be important to examine change across all cities. To capture spaces and place that may not physically exist anymore, but still emphasizing the importance of cultural and communal history in place (Hayden, 1995).

Lastly, this research also revealed a nuanced and non-binary approach to understanding processes like gentrification. Examining the deeper connections, experiences, and interpretations of commercial space and change can reveal a less ‘fixed’ position on such processes. I propose a deeper examination into these experiences and interpretations of such processes by communities on the margin and communities of color would reveal a more ambiguous interpretation of spatial processes and reimagine how to think about spatial processes.

Concluding Thoughts/Lessons Learned

Throughout this research I learned the ways that young adults can complicate traditional spatial process, but also captured the importance of space and place for youth and young adults. I learned that there *is* the possibility for a more nuanced interpretation of space, place, and place processes. The work of a scholar like Doreen Massey, sets the stage for understanding place as a process which involves many stories, memories, imaginations, and interpretations (Massey, 2013). That’s exactly what this research found, a complexity in understanding space and place. I believe incorporating youth and young adult narratives contributes to this complexity by giving a fuller picture of what space and place has encompassed and what space and place may become.

Building on literature on commercial spaces as sites of cultural significance and community building (Steigemann, 2019), and youth geographies that center the agency of young people in facilitating a sense of place (Skelton-Aitken, 2019), this research recognizes commercial spaces as an important site of community engagement for young people of color. While much attention has been paid to the economic impacts of COVID-19 on minority-owned businesses and minority neighborhoods (Dua et al., 2021); this research examines the impacts of the pandemic and gentrification on Hispanic-Latino/a commercial spaces as sites of community making, identity building, and facilitating a sense of place, focused explicitly on young adults. This study found that the experiences of Hispanic-Latino/a young adults, who have grown up and interacted with this space consistently, engages social, cultural, and communal development throughout time. The lens of the Hispanic-Latino/a young adult individual magnifies the significance and the future of the Wells Avenue space. A space imagined by youth and young adults, which includes many cultures, changes, communities, and desires. Change in this commercial space is not 'good' or 'bad,' rather, it has the possibility to embody these imagined desires by my participants. Each individual story enters into a new interpretation and image of what space and place means; past, present, and future.

Chapter 8

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Questions with Self-Identified Hispanic-Latino/a Young Adults

1. What has/is your relationship with the Wells neighborhood? What are some of the reasons you come to Wells today?
 - a. What is your family's relationship with the Wells Neighborhood?
2. How do you, your friends, or your family use the Wells businesses? How many years have you, your friends, or family frequented these businesses?
 - a. How did your family interact/use this space, and do you have memories associated with this?
3. What is most important about the businesses for you in the Wells neighborhood? Why would you and your family frequent here versus elsewhere?
4. What do you think the relationship between businesses and community is? How do the businesses help facilitate community and community for who?
 - a. More business to community or more community helping businesses? Or both?
5. How have you observed or experienced the Hispanic/Latino community interacting with the businesses and spaces along Wells Avenue over time?
 - a. Do you have any childhood memories that inform how you interact with these spaces now?
6. How would you characterize the changes that have occurred in the commercial spaces of Wells? See how the participants characterize the changes.
7. How did you engage with Wells Avenue and its businesses during the pandemic? If you came to Wells, what did you observe?

- a. Biggest concern during the pandemic and being in this commercial/communal space?
8. Do you have any stories or experiences that stand out to you about the Wells Avenue business district? **Strongest memories?**
 - a. What makes these memories stand out to you?
 9. How would you explain the culture/identity of Wells Avenue and its place in the city to someone who is not familiar with Reno?
 - a. The design features, long-standing community, etc.?

Photo Activity Questions

10. Take a photo(s) of a place/space in the Wells Avenue corridor that you have seen, experienced, or thought of as meaningful. Please provide a couple sentences as to why you find this place/space meaningful.
11. Explicitly take a photo of a place/space that records a memory for you. Share the memory (if you feel comfortable).

Appendix B

Link and Description of Interactive StoryMap

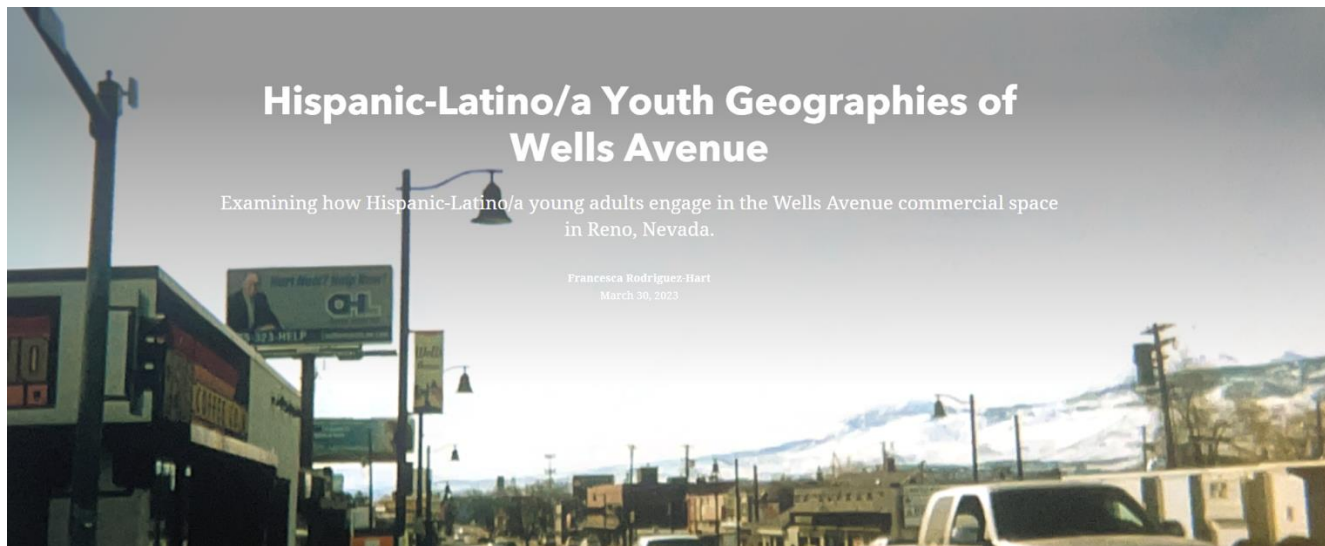


Image 11. Cover of StoryMap Website

Link to StoryMap: <https://arcg.is/1vPCKa>

Description

This ArcGIS StoryMap illustrates the creation and results of this thesis project. All chapters are summarized and introduced within this website, for the public to engage with. This website is public so that any individual has the capability to engage with the results of this research outside of an academic atmosphere. This StoryMap also includes an interactive map tour so that the public can engage with the photos captured by participants in a map that georeferenced the location of where the photos were taken. These photos also include brief descriptions of these commercial spaces as described by the participants. This StoryMap communicates the context and results of this research project and allows for community members to experience, engage, and visualize the data that was collected and analyzed.