

Fortunate People in a Fortunate Land: Dwelling and Residential Alienation in
Santa Monica's Rent-Controlled Housing

by

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Abstract

The importance of safe and stable housing for individual and community wellbeing is widely acknowledged. However, for the one third of Americans who rent their homes, housing-related stress and precarity (residential alienation) may undermine stability and a sense of home. Rent control is perhaps the most well-known tenant protection policy in the United States, but it remains highly controversial and its efficacy has been debated for decades. This research is the first academic inquiry to examine the policy through the experience of residents of rent-controlled housing. In academic discourse dominated by quantitative inquiry from the discipline of economics, this study contributes a qualitative, micro-level perspective that is critically missing from our understanding of the policy.

Santa Monica, California is known nationally as an exemplar of strong rent control and a pro-tenant local government. Over forty years after the implementation of rent control it also has some of the highest market rents in the region. This case study draws on a number of theoretical constructs to explore the extent to which residents of rent-controlled housing in Santa Monica experience dwelling/at-homeness in their home environments, and the nexus between these experiences and tenant protections like rent control. I synthesize findings from 30 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Santa Monica renters with archival media articles, interviews with tenant lawyers and City staff, City documents and multifamily housing industry materials. My findings confirm many of the positive policy outcomes that renters have described for decades, while simultaneously illustrating the detrimental effects of state-level legal loopholes on

participants' ontological security. Along with several other policy recommendations, this study points to the urgent need to close these loopholes by repealing Costa Hawkins and the Ellis Act. On a larger scale, it articulates the irreconcilable tension between housing as home and as a commodity investment vehicle, pointing toward a need for a de-commodified housing system.

For my mother, whose spirit inhabits this work

For my father, who at 80, still believes a better world is possible

For my hometown, *populus felix in urbe felici*

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Preface

Initiation Song From The Finder's Lodge

Please bring strong things.
Please come bringing new things.
Let very old things come into your hands.
Let what you do not know come into your eyes.
Let desert sand harden your feet.
Let the arch of your feet be the mountains.
Let the paths of your fingertips be your maps
And the ways you go be the lines on your palms.
Let there be deep snow in your inbreathing
And your outbreath be of shining ice.
May your mouth contain the shapes of strange words.
May you smell food cooking you have not eaten.
May the spring of a foreign river be your navel.
May your soul be at home where there are no houses.
Walk carefully, well loved one,
Walk mindfully, well loved one,
Walk fearlessly, well loved one.
Return with us, return to us,
Be always coming home.

-Ursula K. Le Guin, *Always Coming Home* (1985)

Chapter One: Introduction

It is high summer, and Santa Monica's Ocean Front Walk is thronged with people of all ages, races and ethnicities, clad in everything from bikinis to burkas. Walking the length of the path, you might hear a dozen languages spoken, as tourists and locals blend together, gliding by on bikes, rollerblades and skates, Segways, wheelchairs and skateboards; running, walking and occasionally breakdancing. From a row of immaculately restored classic cars in the parking lot - their suspensions lowered as far as they can conceivably go - emits the sweet sounds of Art Leboe's golden oldies, piped through a stereo system with a serious subwoofer. The Ferris wheel spins on the pier, and perhaps you hear carousel music spilling softly out of the historic Looff Hippodrome. In the distance the ocean shimmers, stretching endlessly to the horizon line, dotted with tiny sails and the shapes of surfers in their wetsuits. Palm trees sway in the coastal breeze, their fronds making a rushing water sound like the inside of a shell, as the smell of creosote from the pier fills the air (see Figure 1).

Two miles east, school is out for the summer at John Adams Middle School, but the pergola outside the cafeteria is buzzing with activity as people arrive for the annual Santa Monicans for Renters Rights (SMRR) convention. This year members will hear candidate speeches and arguments for and against various ballot measures, before casting their votes for who will receive the organization's coveted endorsements. At stake this year are seats on City Council, the Rent Control Board and the School Board. At the door volunteers offer stickers and literature to support various candidates, while old friends greet each other warmly. Inside the cafeteria a few hundred Santa Monicans sit in folding chairs, converse with each other and cast their votes. The candidates emphasize their

connections to the city; attending public schools, legacy small family businesses, length of tenure, and above all, their loyalty to SMRR and its ideals. Long-time SMRR leaders and volunteers circulate through the crowd making sure everything is running smoothly, and occasionally making announcements in front of the room. There is a general spirit of camaraderie and familiarity, and the occasional quip from the crowd provokes a wave of chuckles.

A motion to consider endorsing Proposition 10 is introduced by SMRR co-chair Denny Zane. This California ballot initiative would enable Santa Monica to return its rent control law to something closer to its original form. A motion in support from a woman named Sylvia lists the many reasons why strengthening and expanding the existing law is crucial. Jay provides a counterpoint, arguing that it will only worsen the housing affordability crisis by forcing landlords to take their properties off the market. The motion to support Proposition 10 then goes to a vote, as someone yells out “the rents are too damn high!” and the crowd cheers. Members vote ‘yes’ or ‘no’ by raising red cards, and Zane declares, “the ‘ayes’ have it, SMRR will endorse Prop 10.”¹

This convention has taken place every year since SMRR took over the city’s government in 1979, with a series of dramatic electoral victories that made headlines nationwide. This tiny revolution not only brought strict rent control to the small coastal city that was 81% renters at the time it began, but was also the catalyst for a holistic progressive vision and a new era of participatory democracy and civic engagement in the city. Forty years later, Santa Monica is probably better known within the Los Angeles

¹ This vignette of the 2018 SMRR convention was created from several recordings and my memory of the event.

area for its expansive public beach, pier amusement park, and astronomical rents. Yet for the thousands of Santa Monica residents who are able to remain in their homes by the good graces of the city's tenant protections and resources, SMRR's legacy remains integral to their continued residency. One of the underlying questions implied in conducting this research is, to what extent does this vision endure forty years on, and did it accomplish what it set out to do?

Figure 1: Looking westward from Bernard Way



1.1 Overview

The importance of safe and stable housing for mental health, physical health and general wellbeing is widely acknowledged. In addition to positive outcomes for individuals and households, housing stability is also considered to foster strong and vibrant communities. However, one third of Americans rent their homes, and many renter households experience housing-related stress due to a range of factors. These include inequitable relationships with landlords or property managers, unregulated rents, poor housing conditions, and the threat of eviction without cause. In light of this, households residing in localities with stronger tenant protections may experience the positive outcomes of safe and stable housing, without as much of the precarity and other stressors that characterize the experience of renting. In the long term these outcomes might include the ability for renters to remain in a gentrified neighborhood they would otherwise be priced-out of; increased personal opportunity (such as career or educational paths); deeper connections to their communities; more equitable relationships with their landlords and property managers; protection from evictions and an overall sense of stability in their housing. At the same time, protections intended to support renters might also fall short of their intended effects due to inadequate enforcement resources, unclear guidelines and other deficiencies.

This case study focuses on the experiences of low- and middle-income households who reside in rent-controlled private market housing in Santa Monica, California. After Santa Monica voters enacted one of the strongest rent control ordinances in the country in 1979, the city has been studied as an exemplary case of a

pro-tenant government with bold progressive policy (Shearer, 1982; Capek & Gilderbloom, 1992; Heskin, 1983; Levine, Grigsby & Heskin, 1990). At the same time, deregulation legislation at the state level, combined with intense speculative behavior in the local real estate market, has seriously eroded the radical potential of the city's original policy, and by extension possibly much of its progressive community vision (Heskin et al., 2000; Kamel, 2012; Chaves Fonseca, 2018). Though Santa Monica continues to have tenant protections and resources far beyond those of most urban areas, and the tenant lobby held majority power in city government for most of the past four decades, the rental housing market is also one of the most expensive in the United States (Casuso, 2019). As such, the contemporary city is one in which low- and moderate-income residents live in below-market housing alongside affluent - and often transient - millennials working in the tech and entertainment sectors, in a community that is bifurcated along socioeconomic lines.

My research is situated around two overarching questions, and a third pertinent to the time period. First, I use the conceptual frameworks of *dwelling* (Saegert, 1986) *residential alienation* (Madden & Marcuse, 2018) and *place alienation* (Tuttle, 2021) (added in analysis) to understand the extent to which individuals feel 'at home' or not 'at home' in their home environments in Santa Monica. This entails examining aspects of the participant's relationship with their home environment on multiple scales (residence, block, neighborhood) to articulate their holistic relationship to place. Second, I explore the nexus of these experiences with Santa Monica's tenant protection policies, infrastructure, and resources². These protections include rent control, 'just-cause' eviction

² Henceforward referred to as "tenant protections"

policy, anti-harassment legislation, mediation programs, tenant education resources and support offered by various city agencies. They also include policies specific to the COVID pandemic, such as local and statewide eviction moratoriums, arrearage repayment periods and rental assistance. In the course of analysis I also identified the importance of additional factors, including the rental/real estate market, local sociopolitical ideology about renting, and the personality and business model of the landlord or property manager. Lastly, because this research took place during the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, it presented an opportunity to further examine how these extraordinary circumstances impact residents' relationships with their home environments, and the relationship to policy. Thus the third research question asks how the residential experience has changed since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The primary data source is 30 in-depth, semi-structured interviews. These interviews are supported by an historical review of relevant policymaking in the study area; summaries of government resources and tenant education materials; a review of two years of the landlord industry publication, *Apartment Age*; and interviews with tenant attorneys, advocates and City staff. The theoretical proposition of the research posits that households which fall under the purview of stronger tenant protections may experience positive effects in the inverse of the typical residential experience for renters in America, including:

1. The ability to remain in a gentrifying neighborhood long term
2. Freedom to invest time and resources in personalizing the home
3. Increased personal capacity and opportunity
4. Deeper connections to the community and neighbors
5. More equitable relationships with property managers and landlords
6. Sense of stability
7. Sustainable housing cost increases

My research questions explore participant experiences, interpretation of experiences, and subsequent behaviors:

1. To what extent do renters experience feeling ‘at home’ (*dwelling*) or ‘not at home’ (*residential alienation*), and what factors contribute to those experiences?
2. What is the nexus between those experiences and tenant protections?
 1. Does knowledge and/or deployment of protections contribute to a sense of stability and dwelling?
 2. Do tenant protections result in material outcomes that contribute to a sense of stability and dwelling?
 3. Are these protections or their outcomes a consideration in behaviors like caretaking the home and community engagement?
3. How have these experiences changed since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic?

In asking these questions I seek to understand the holistic residential experience in this tenure and context, and its relationship to policy. While not generalizable in the sense of an experimental design, findings about these questions provide insight about these policies and the residential experience that may be applicable to other locales. Though not the main focus of the research, these questions also point to an overarching question of whether Santa Monica’s pro-renter policies have been effective, and by extension, the extent to which its progressive vision endures.

1.2 Renting in a homeowner society

Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, cultural ideology around the value of homeownership and the policies that support it have been mutually reinforcing in a number of nations (Ronald, 2008; Stone, 1986). In the United States, neoliberal rhetoric positions the owner-occupied house as means of stability, status, and

wealth accumulation (Saegert, Fields & Libman, 2009). Accordingly, the federal government has invested heavily in promoting ownership, with the mortgage interest tax write-off reaching hundreds of billions each year by entitlement (Krueckeberg, 1999). For many households, especially low-income ones, owning a home will be their only form of equity, and it is widely accepted as one of the most reliable ways to invest capital and pass on generational wealth (Wegmann, Schafran & Pfeiffer, 2017).

However, homeownership is also subject to vulnerabilities and risk, as illustrated by the subprime mortgage crisis and ensuing foreclosure epidemic (Wegmann, et al., 2017; Ehlenz, 2014). Thus the federal government's prioritization of homeownership as a form of residential tenure is not driven by proven positive outcomes as much as by its role within the political economy, and by its symbolic relationship with American individualism. To this point, Aalbers & Christophers (2014) write, "The fetishization of the ideology not only of private property but also of wealth-accumulation and markets is, of course, writ large in the political project of expanding homeownership" (p 385). They argue that there is nothing intrinsically superior about the tenure, but rather its advantages stem from its institutional and cultural valorization at the expense of other tenures. Andre, Dewilde & Luijkx (2017) address the socially-constructed nature of tenure superiority in their study of four different national housing regimes. They find that tenure structures result directly from "ideologically driven power relations underlying qualitatively different institutional arrangement between states, markets and families" (p 246).

Meanwhile, renting continues to be stigmatized, which often means tenants must fight for their rights - which lie in opposition to and even threaten those of private

property (Heskin, 1983) - without the support of their homeowner neighbors. Given the primacy of homeownership, Goetz & Sidney (1994) argue that “tenants have occupied a precarious social and political position in the US...[because] tax and property laws disadvantage renters, while public policy is often made in deference to owners of property” (p 321). In his study of the California rent control movement, Heskin (1983) characterized the homeowner ideology as “possessive individualism,” wherein the self is defined through ownership. Though identity can certainly be expressed through a wide range of products in our world of consumer commodities, there is arguably no other form of ownership as prestigious and symbolic as the home. And as the “unpropertied in a society in which property is central” (ibid, p xi), Heskin argues that tenants are essentially viewed as failed yeoman farmers, who are either in their unfortunate situation because they are lazy, or because they are inept. This perception of character deficiency is expressed in public discourse (Vale, 2000), as well as in renters’ relationships with homeowners, neighborhood associations, the state, and of course, landlords. In a system that privileges property owners, Shlay (2015) sums up fundamental structural inequities and their implications:

“Through policies around homeownership and rental housing, U.S. housing policy continues to wreak havoc with the application of core American values such as equal opportunity, social tolerance, and beliefs in cultural pluralism. While laws such as fair housing or community reinvestment attempt to correct for specific problems in the housing market, it is the overall organization of the housing market, not occasional economic aberrations or market failure, that works to increase economic inequality and reduce people’s opportunities for economic success” (p 561).

This dynamic can also create a schism along housing tenure lines in neighborhoods and cities (Rollwagen, 2014), where renters are perceived as less

upstanding and fully invested citizens and stakeholders (Ronald, 2008; Saegert, et al., 2009) by homeowners and policymakers alike. Though it is widely accepted in the community engagement literature that homeowners participate in community groups at significantly higher levels than renters, scholars have advanced a multitude of (sometimes conflicting) theories to explain this phenomenon. Some prominent variables identified, in addition to type of tenure, are the presence of children in the household (Cox, 1982; Carson, Chappel & Dujela, 2010), education level (McCabe (2013), income (Ronald, 2008; McCabe 2013), and gender (Carson et al., 2010). The complexity of various contexts and lack of consensus on motivation led Ronald (2008) to conclude that “data on homeowner activism remains generally inconsistent and the rationalizations and sociopolitical responses of homeowners are varied” (p 34). Moreover, Aalbers & Christophers (2014) argue that the beneficial participation outcomes of homeownership do not arise from the tenure *itself*, but rather as a consequence of “the political project of pushing homeownership at the expense of other tenures” (p 385). In other words, higher levels of participation stem from the ways in which homeownership is culturally connected with full citizen status, which is communicated by the differential levels of support the state offers to homeowners.

Several studies suggest that low renter participation is connected to this dynamic, and in particular, the schism between renters and homeowner perceptions of stakeholder status. Goetz & Sidney (1994) uncovered a revanchist mentality at least partially motivated by maintaining property values amongst inner-city homeowners in majority-renter neighborhoods in the Twin Cities, who galvanized in opposition to affordable housing developments. Carson et al. (2010) found significant differences in the way

renters and homeowners perceived renters' place attachment, as well as a correlation between homeownership and feelings of influence and self-efficacy in making change. Similarly, Hooper & Cadstedt's (2014) research on participatory planning in Tanzania discovered that "renters were unwilling and often unable to participate due to perceptions, held by themselves and others, of renter transience and inconsequentiality" (p 25). This was a mutually reinforcing process, where perceptions of renters led to their interests being ignored, which made them disinclined to participate, and further marginalized their status in the process. These findings suggest renters may not be participating in neighborhood associations because they do not feel that they have full stakeholder status. Additionally, the constant precarity experienced by many renters in the United States, due in part to the (mostly) minimal legal protections afforded them, likely plays a role in deciding not to invest time and emotional energy in one's community.

1.3 Rent control

Rent control policies in the United States have proliferated in urban areas throughout the twentieth century. They continue to be highly controversial among the real estate industry and conservative thinkers, and simultaneously at the forefront of housing justice advocacy worldwide. The country's first real rent control policy, the Emergency Rent Laws, was introduced in 1920 in New York City, in response to extensive tenant organizing around the post-World War I housing shortage. It was eventually lifted in 1929 despite protest, after several extensions (Spencer, 1986). During World War II the federal government enacted the first and only national rent control law,

to address the nationwide decline in housing construction, combined with urban migration of defense workers. The Emergency Price Control Act of 1942 established the Office of Price Administration (OPA), which had the power to open local offices that could elect to freeze rents. Faced with significant opposition from the landlord industry, it ended in 1950 (Naison, 1986).

Today over 200 municipalities have some form of rent control (Gilderbloom, 2008), and both California and Oregon have moderate versions of the policy at the state level. New York City has had rent control since the implementation of the World War II act, but legislation in other jurisdictions was introduced in the late twentieth century through the present. Though there are many different incarnations both within the US and worldwide, the universal characteristics are 1. limits on rent increases, 2. limits on ‘no cause’ evictions, and 3. more stringent maintenance standards (Gilderbloom & Ye, 2008). There are a myriad of exceptions for each of these aspects, which vary by locale (Ambrosius, Gilderbloom, Steele, Meares & Keating, 2015). For example, Oregon allows for no-cause (or ‘no-fault’) eviction if the owner or a family member *intends* to move into the residence, and there is not a similar dwelling available on the same property (Bach, 2019), whereas San Francisco requires proof that the move actually occurred.

What Gilderbloom & Ye (2008) refer to as ‘first-generation’ rent control is characterized by much stricter limitations on rent increases, including total rent freezes, as was permitted by the wartime policies. The ‘second generation’ rent control policies introduced in various jurisdictions in the 1970s “differed significantly from the first-generation rent control policies because they were seen as moderate as opposed to restrictive” (ibid, p 208). Of these 1970s policies, they characterize some versions as a

third form of the policy: ‘strong rent control’. This incarnation was found in three California cities (Santa Monica, Berkeley, and West Hollywood), and 1. allowed for increases substantially lower than the Consumer Price Index (CPI), 2. prohibited any form of vacancy-decontrol (which enables the landlord to raise the rent to market rates between tenancies, and 3. had tenant-majority rent boards to administer the law.

These ‘strong rent control’ policies were weakened by California state law in the 1990s. However, other countries and cities are continuing to implement more progressive policies. In response to massive tenant protests, Berlin passed a five-year rent freeze in 2019 that applied to 1.5 million homes (Knight, 2019) and limited upscaling through renovation, which has been a common tactic to raise once-affordable rents over the past decade (Fields & Uffer, 2016). However, in April 2021 Berlin’s rent control law was overturned by a national court, which ruled that it was unconstitutional. After more than a decade of weakening protections, renters in New York State achieved a major victory with the passage of the Housing Stability and Tenants’ Protections Act. The legislation addressed the impending expiration of state rent control law and closed a number of problematic loopholes. These include ending high-rent vacancy deregulation, adding protections against unnecessary major capital improvements, and individual apartment improvements. As in California, these landlord tactics have been incentivized by vacancy decontrol, as a means of removing the current tenant in order to charge more rent. State lawmakers also implemented legislation that enables other jurisdictions to adopt rent control policies (Pitt, 2019).

The COVID-19 era has seen a continuation of what might be called the ‘third wave’ of rent control policies in the United States and beyond. In November 2021, Voters

in St. Paul, Minnesota approved what Gilderbloom & Ye (2008) would call ‘strong rent control’, which includes vacancy control - limiting rent increases *between* tenancies to 3% - and does not exclude new buildings or properties owned by ‘mom and pop’ landlords. When implemented, it will be the strongest rent control law in the United States. Minneapolis voters also approved a ballot measure to authorize City Council to develop a rent control policy; voters in Santa Ana, California passed a rent control initiative in October of 2021; and newly elected Boston Mayor Michelle Wu included rent control in her campaign platform ([O’Donnell, 2021](#)).

1.4 Sociology of Residence and philosophy of research

Academic research continues to play a central role in the ongoing debate about rent control. For example, the City of Minneapolis commissioned a report about the impacts of rent control policies in other cities from the University of Minnesota’s Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, helmed by housing scholar Edward Goetz. However, the vast majority of research on rent control comes from the field of economics and is thus situated within a market-based framework which views housing as a consumer good. This discourse considers aspects like supply and demand, housing affordability, housing misallocation, deterioration of rental stock, fiscal impacts on the tax base, and housing availability (Sturtevant, 2018). Additionally, like most research, it is the product of money, power and ideology embedded in universities and research centers, and “is not a neutral field of study carried out by dispassionate academics” (Gilderbloom & Ye, 2008, p 67). To this end, Kemeny (1988) applies the constructivist perspective from the sociology of science to point to the presence of dominant paradigms and hegemonic

ideologies in housing studies. Given that “the battle over rent control is often over which study is right and which study is wrong,” (Gilderbloom & Ye, 2008, p 68) the stakes are high, and can have real impact on the lives of millions.

My research offers a different approach, by pivoting focus to the lived experiences of residents. This epistemological orientation answers Kemeny’s call for a ‘sociology of residence’, rather than ‘housing’. In his seminal book, *Housing and Social Theory* (1992), he critiques the housing research field for its “subject-fixated approach,” which he describes as “a sterile and limited empirical focus, concentrating on analyzing the housing market and housing policy” (p 34). Furthermore, he worries that the institutionalization of power structures in the field will lead to an entrenchment of this “unreflexive empirical study in abstraction from society as a whole” (p xvi). This conceptual distinction of a ‘sociology of residence’ shifts the emphasis of housing studies from the physical structure itself to residential experience, by deploying theoretical frameworks found in social science disciplines like sociology and community psychology.

Accordingly, my research is not concerned with housing market economics, policy comparison, or other macro-level forms of analysis. Rather, it takes up an ‘occupant-centered view’ (Wegmann, et al. 2017) of housing in order to understand tenants’ lived experiences and how they relate to policy and other external factors. This research also embraces the Los Angeles Tenants’ Union’s call for centering the tenant rather than the physical housing itself (Rosenthal, 2018), by positioning them in this study as the true experts on the topic. The framing and emphasis is also a political statement about the state of academic discourse around rent control in specific, and rental

housing more generally. As Kemeny (1992) wrote, “Science is not a neutral and purely cerebral exercise. It must rather be understood as a socially embedded act in which involvement and detachment interfold in complex ways” (p xviii). As a renter and renters’ rights activist born and raised in Santa Monica, I recognize that my positionality is inextricable from my approach.

1.5 Research objectives and intended impacts

As Boot et al. (1995) write, “you have no research problem until you know the cost of your incomplete knowledge or flawed understanding, a cost that you define in terms of a yet greater ignorance or misunderstanding.” While there has been a wide array of academic research about the material impacts of rent control on housing stock, rents and other macro-level aspects, the literature is noticeably lacking in inquiry that examines residents’ lived experience. Additionally, conducting research that looks at the tenant experience both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented opportunity to examine how this type of crisis impacts households’ sense of home on a granular level, and the role that emergency protections and already existing policies and resources may or may not play in relation to it.

Answering Kemeny’s (1992) call for a ‘sociology of residence’, my research draws from theoretical frameworks in environmental and community psychology, sociology, and cultural geography to explore the nuances of individuals’ lived experiences. The intention is to develop an understanding of the material conditions, events, perceptions, interpretations, and subsequent behaviors of tenants living in market rental housing with tenant protections, and how they relate to said protections. This is

situated within scholarship that explores the nexus between tenure, wellbeing, and the person-place relationship (Kearns, Hiscock, Ellaway & MacIntyre, 2000; Hiscock, Kearns, MacIntyre & Ellaway, 2001; Hackett, Saegert, Dozier & Marinova, 2019; Saegert, Greer, Thaden & Anthony, 2015; Baxter, 2017; McKee, Soaita & Hoolachan, 2019, etc.). My findings reveal previously unexamined positive outcomes of tenant protections that benefit both the individual household and the community as a whole, as well as illustrations of the policy functioning in some of the more obvious ways (e.g., longevity of tenure). At the same time, there are a number of factors that undermine the intended effects of these policies, and/or satisfaction with the home environment on various scales. Overall, participants have strong attachments to their home environments, and deploy a repertoire of coping strategies to maintain ‘ontological security’ (Giddens, 1991) - and by extension a state of *dwelling* - when faced with precarity and other housing-related stress.

To return to Boot et al. (1995), the volume of what we do not know about residents’ experience in rent-controlled housing is a critical knowledge gap for both policymakers and tenant activists. As far as I am aware, this is the first study to examine the lived experience of those who reside in rent-controlled housing. The intended impact of my research is to a. inform policy makers about how policy, infrastructure and resources can better meet the needs of tenants, b. provide housing scholars with avenues for further study on aspects of the tenant experience, and c. assist housing justice activists in re-framing the debate from an economic to a resident-centered discourse.

1.6 Dissertation overview

This document is organized in a sequence of literature review, research design, contextual background drawn from supporting data, interview findings, discussion and conclusion. Chapter Two offers a detailed review of the literature that is relevant to this study. The first three sections outline the literature gap, with a review of scholarship on rent control and on housing precarity among private market renters. I then provide an overview of the ‘sociology of residence’ (Kemeny, 1992) approach, and cite a body of literature on different forms of housing tenure that approaches the residential experience from this general perspective. The second half of the chapter covers various theoretical engagements that informed the research design and/or data analysis.

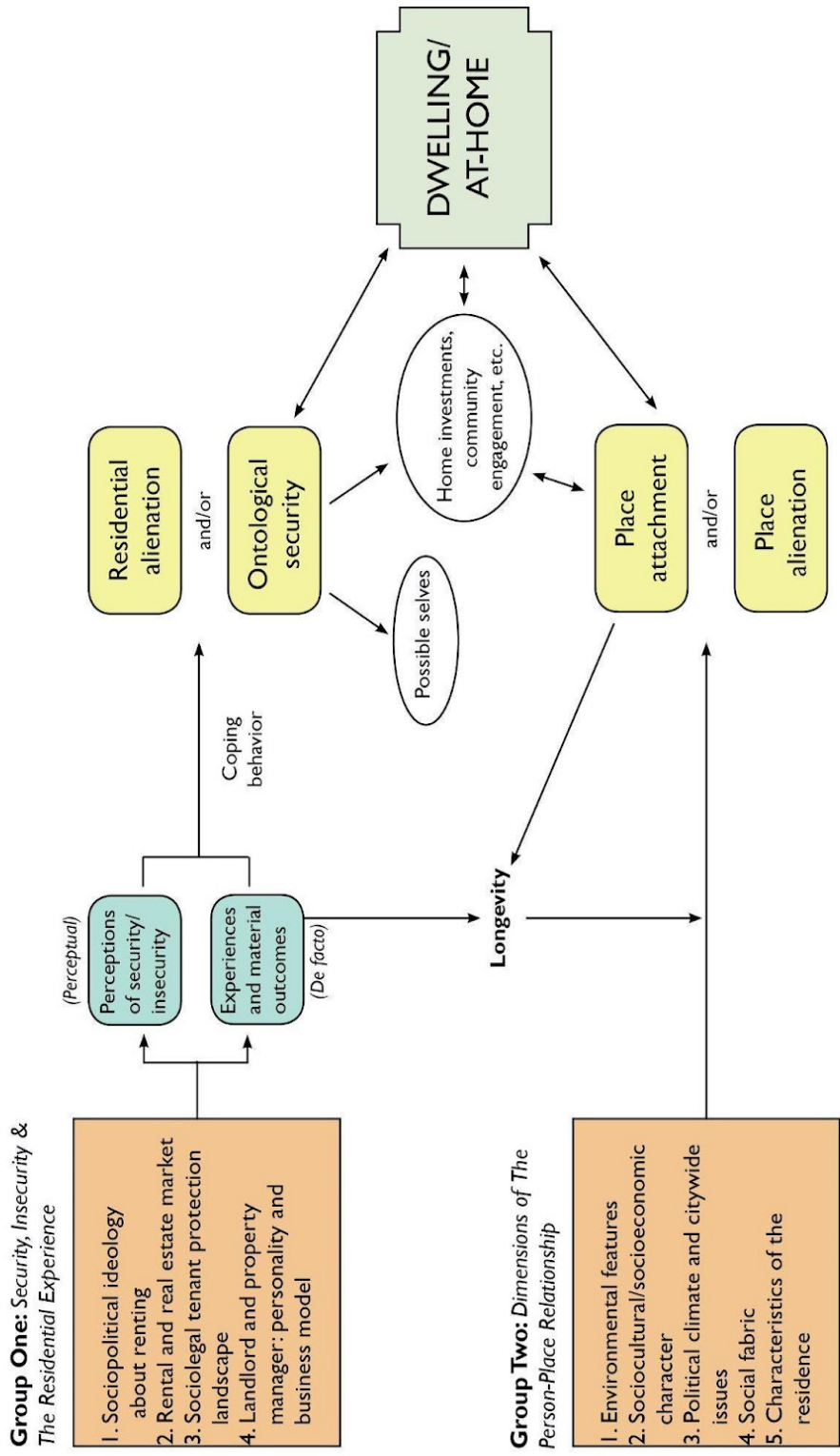
Chapter Three explains the research design, with sections on positionality, epistemology, methodology and methods, participants and recruitment, conducting the interviews, and analysis. Chapters Four and Five offer thick description of the study site gleaned from the supporting data sources. This is consistent with the case study methodology, which is selected when asking questions where the boundaries between a phenomenon and its context are unclear (Yin, 2003). A rich situating of the phenomenon in its context is also necessary in that housing and the residential experience is “embedded within wider social, political and economic relations that stretch beyond and influence how it is understood and experienced” (Cheshire et al. (2021). In other words, the extent to which one feels at home in their residence/neighborhood/city is informed by factors on multiple scales – some of which may even be unknown to the individual.

Accordingly, and in line with the ‘secure occupancy’ framework that will be discussed in Chapter Two, Chapter Four provides important contextual foundations that

illustrate facets one (sociopolitical ideology about renting) and three (sociolegal tenant protection landscape) of Group One of the factors that inform dwelling (see Figure 2 below). Similarly, Chapter Five offers context for facets two (rental and real estate market) and four (landlord and property manager: personality and business model). Both chapters include themes and hypothesis drawn from the supporting data about what I thought I might find in analyzing the primary data.

Chapters Six and Seven present findings from the primary data, interviews with 30 Santa Monica renters. Chapter Six explores different facets and scales of participants' place relationship, which are represented on the concept map (Figure 2) as Group Two factors. Chapter Seven identifies elements of security, insecurity and residential alienation in the home, which are created *through* the Group One factors explored in Chapters Four and Five. Chapter Eight discusses the key findings of the study, which are synthesized from themes identified in the supporting data and the interview findings. This triangulation ultimately informed creation of the concept map, which was not theorized previously. The dissertation concludes with Chapter Nine, which offers policy recommendations, suggestions for future research, and remarks about the research's significance and application to other settings.

Figure 2: Concept map of the relationship between the two groups that inform dwelling



Chapter Two: Literature

This research draws on several different theoretical strands to examine the intersection of the person-place relationship with policy, infrastructure and enforcement/education resources. This includes literature on housing instability, ontological security, place attachment, community attachment, dwelling, residential alienation, secure occupancy, power dynamics within landlord-tenant relationships, and rent control. This chapter begins by situating my research in the literature and identifying several gaps. It then offers an overview of relevant literature and key theoretical constructs that informed my research design and/or analysis.

2.1 Negative impacts of housing insecurity and other housing-related stress

Due to externalities like wage stagnation, weak tenant protections, and a lack of safe and affordable homes, renters in homeowner societies experience higher levels of forced mobility than homeowners. This precarity exists in tandem with a number of other stressors associated with lack of control over housing quality, management and cost. In their research on risk and security in the United Kingdom's rental housing market, Baxter (2017) found widespread involuntary mobility among renter households. They concluded that the "experience of such precariousness has a notable impact on the experience of private renting and the extent to which individuals feel 'at home' in the tenure" (p 2). Similarly, Morris, Hulse and Pawson's (2017) study of long-term renters in Australia found that most low-income renters experienced 'perpetual insecurity' in the form of

constant anxiety about having to move at any given time and being unable to find another home that meets their needs. This effect was also found to a lesser extent with higher-income renters, especially those who have school-age children. Renters who had been previously dislocated were especially likely to feel this perpetual precarity. In total, one in four long term renters interviewed (N=600) experienced constant anxiety about housing insecurity.

Housing precarity - regardless of the tenure type - has a range of negative consequences. In Desmond, Gershenson & Kiviat's (2015) study of Milwaukee renters (N=1,000), they found that low-income renters who experience forced mobility often are forced to accept substandard housing, which then results in further moves. In particular, evictions can present a substantial barrier to accessing housing, leaving households with few options (Desmond, 2016). Cox, Wenzel and Rice's (2016) comprehensive literature review on housing insecurity identifies a higher likelihood of food insecurity, poor physical and mental health, low birth weight, antisocial behavior among youth, and developmental risk in children as common costs to families and individuals. In their study on the health impacts of foreclosure, Libman et al. (2012) found that the relationship between stress, poor mental health and financial hardship can be mutually reinforcing: the former may precipitate mortgage delinquency and foreclosure, which then exacerbates the situation and threatens the individual's ability to manage the crisis. They found that the threat of foreclosure led to depression, fatigue and helplessness, ending marriages, loss of appetite, and in one case, contemplation of suicide.

In this same vein, Pollack, Griffin and Lynch (2010, c.f. Fullilove, 2010) identified a connection between difficulty paying for housing and self-reported poor

health, hypertension, arthritis, and deferral of healthcare visits and buying medication. Suglia, Duarte & Sandel (2011) found that mothers who experienced ‘housing disarray’ (dark, crowded and noisy) and instability were more likely to have depression, while those experiencing only instability were more likely to have generalized anxiety disorder. Mason, Baker, Blakely & Bentley (2013) compared the relationship between diminishing housing affordability and mental health for both homeowners and renters. They found tenure to be a significantly mediating variable, and concluded that “private renters appeared to be more vulnerable than home purchasers to mental health effects of unaffordable housing” (p 91).

Poor housing quality, housing instability and forced mobility have also been shown to have a range of negative impacts on children and adolescents. Coley, Leventhal, Lynch & Kull (2013) look at this relationship through the ‘family stress perspective’ of childhood development, and find that “in line with expectations, results suggested that when housing quality declines, mothers’ functioning declines as well, helping to explain decreases in children’s socioemotional well-being” (p 1787). Poor housing quality, in particular, contributes to behavioral and emotional problems. The authors hypothesize this is because structural and maintenance deficiencies elevate family stress, increase parents’ mental health problems, and limit their ability to regulate family activities. Schmitt, Finders & McClelland (2015) found that residential mobility has a negative impact on inhibitory control (behavior) and on math and literacy for preschool age children. Similarly, Ziol-Guest & McKenna’s (2014) research revealed that moving three or more times during the child’s first five years is significantly associated with behavioral issues, like increases in attention problems. Poverty was the mitigating factor, with

differing results for children from other socioeconomic groups that had moved a similar amount of times.

Displacement often results in a loss of social networks of reliance and support that are especially crucial for lower-income households and communities, in addition to cultural resources and attachments. According to Greene, Tehranifar, Hernandez-Cordero, and Fullilove (2011), what is lost is “such features of social relations as reciprocal expectations, trustworthiness, and effective norms and sanctions” (p 404). Culturally, forced mobility can mean a loss of shared languages and traditions, systems of belief, and values “used by members of a group to ascribe meanings to events and experiences, to define roles and their distribution among members of given social groups, and to set norms for social interactions” (p 404).

This is reflected in Skobba & Goetz’s (2013) study on mobility among low-income households, which found that relationships are the driving factor in locational decision-making. This research is situated in the context of understanding client housing choices in the Moving to Opportunity program, and concludes that support networks are an essential resource for low-income families to meet their basic needs, which leads to the prioritization of neighborhood relationships over other locational characteristics. Manzo, Kleit & Couch’s (2008) findings confirm the importance of social capital, in their study on the HOPE VI redevelopment of the Columbia Villas public housing development in North Portland. Despite outsider perceptions of deprivation and dilapidation, the majority of residents did not wish to relocate from the site, and described conditions of a “socially-well functioning community” that “allowed residents to lay

down roots, form place attachments and create bonds of mutual support with neighbors” (p 1855).

2.2 Literature gap

While there is a wealth of literature about precarity and other negative experiences in market rental housing, there is a dearth of research that considers what aspects *support* the wellbeing of renter households. In contrast to these negative outcomes, “residential stability begets a kind of psychological stability, which allows people to place an emotional investment in their home, social relationships, and community and promotes subjective well-being based on empathy and reciprocity” (Desmond et al., 2015, p 254). This is the objective of rent control. However, rent control remains highly controversial within policy circles, public discourse, and to some extent, academia. Many of the challenges in advocating for its merits can be attributed to the fact that the vast majority of empirical research about the policy’s application and outcomes in various settings is situated within an economic framework, where the emphasis is on the optimal allocation of housing as a commodity resource. I have yet to encounter even one article that examines this policy from the perspective of the residents who live under its protection. This critical gap misses opportunities to identify the policy’s positive outcomes beyond displacement prevention (which, in some cases, is contested as a benefit). Economist Matthew Gross (2020) recognizes this limitation, acknowledging that the benefits are difficult to quantify and especially so without longitudinal data. By the same token, the quantitative, economic approach is also limited in its ability to understand how and why the policies are not functioning as well as they could be.

Critics of rent control deploy a range of tactical approaches - both practical and philosophical - to argue against the policy's efficacy. Block (2002) describes rent control as an "economic abomination" (p 75), and alleges that it is responsible for the infamous decay of the South Bronx. He further claims that it does not help low-income tenants, and is thus a "horrendous means of income redistribution" (p 75). Espousing another common critique, he asserts that few economists have defended the policy, and that the City of New York's annual housing survey is conducted by sociologists, bureaucrats and social workers, rather than economists. Moreover, he vehemently opposes the symbolic ownership claims implicit in a redistributive policy like rent control on philosophical grounds, going to far as to use the analogy of American slavery.³ He concludes that "we have examined a plethora of arguments in support of rent control, and have found none of them very compelling. This should occasion no surprise, as the case against rent control is basic to *economic analysis*" (italics mine) (p 86). This assertion of the primacy of economic framework in evaluating the policy's efficacy is often central to arguments against it.

Academic inquiry around rent control is almost exclusively quantitative, and the use of complex modeling methods is common (Gilderbloom & Ye, 2008). Methods that center the residents' lived experience – even by using original survey data and quantitative analysis - are never employed. Skak and Bloze (2013) use a 'diagrammatic presentation' to compare welfare effects between rent control and rent stabilization within the country. In both cases they find housing 'overallocations' and 'underallocations' according to household size and square meters. The misallocation

³ Similar rhetoric is evident in *Apartment Age* magazine. See Chapter Five.

argument (e.g., rent/income relationship, location, number of bedrooms) emerged from the field of economics, and analyzes the distribution of rental residences as commodity goods that have a pareto optimal allocation (Glaeser & Luttimer, 2003; Bulow & Klemperer, 2012; Skak & Bloze, 2013; Krol & Svorny). Glaeser (1996) goes so far as to argue that,

“A major social cost of rent control is that without a fully operational price mechanism the ‘wrong’ consumers end up using the apartments. Unless apartments are somehow allocated perfectly across consumers, rental units will be allocated to consumers who gain little utility from renting and rental units will not go to individuals who desire them greatly” (p 2, c.f. Chang & Sanders, 2010).

This logic eludes the likelihood that misallocation also happens *without* the presence of rent stabilization, as determined by housing costs, incomes and vacancy rates.

Economists Glaeser & Luttmer (2003) examine housing misallocation from a welfare cost perspective as well, using data about rent-stabilized apartments in New York City. They interpret their findings through a classical economic framework, which holds that “wage and price controls may cause the misallocation of goods” (p 1044), and conclude that 21% of apartments “are in the wrong hands” (p 1044), meaning they are inhabited by households with less members than number of bedrooms. This effect increases with the number of years a tenant has resided in their home, which they theorize may be attributed to changing family composition over time. This narrow frame of analysis completely overlooks uses households might have for additional living space, which is a limitation of quantitative research, especially that which relies on existing datasets that contain little detail.

Krol and Svorny's (2005) research is concerned with housing misallocation's presumed driver, 'constrained mobility'. They examine commute times in New Jersey and conclude that the presence of rent control increases commute times through spatial mismatch, indicating "distortions in household location decisions that might result from rent control" (p 433). 'Constrained mobility' is a common theme in the rent control literature, and is underpinned by the assumption that mobility for tenants is a *positive* feature of the tenure. Increased length of tenure is framed as a limitation, which runs counter to the pro-homeownership rhetoric, which holds that stability is one of homeownership's positive outcomes. Scholars like Cox (1984) have concluded that part of the reason homeowners tend to be far less mobile than renters is the high transaction costs of relocating. Krol and Svorny (2005) evoke this theory to explain mobility patterns for renters under rent control, but with a negative interpretation, suggesting that they are trapped rather than stabilized. Their research posits that limited mobility for rent-controlled households is due to the increased cost in rents that would occur should households move closer to their employment. It completely ignores all contextual elements of the home environment, which are myriad (e.g., neighbors, schools, parks, etc.). Ultimately their research reveals a negligible difference in rent control's impact on commutes, with a 2.5% increase in commuters who travel over 25 minutes in New Jersey localities with rent control.

Diamond, McQuade & Qian's (2019) study about the outcomes of rent control in San Francisco is of particular interest, due to how its findings have been evoked by the policy's detractors, as well as occasionally its supporters. Their research finds that the policy "limits" mobility by 20% and lowers displacement, particularly for people of

color. The framing of *limitation* is especially significant here, as it (like the previous articles) implies that reduced residential mobility is a negative factor for renters. They also find, not surprisingly, that rent control in the context of a highly valorized market, paired with substantial legal loopholes and incentives to evade it (e.g., the Ellis Act and vacancy decontrol), results in a 15% reduction in supply. They thus conclude that the policy is inefficient. They attribute this failure - as evidenced by the hypothesized market rate increases caused by the “lost” rental supply - to some unnamed entity or phenomenon, rather than to the agency of landlords seeking to increase profits. The use of the word ‘lost’ is important here, as it suggests a natural process rather than an outcome of deliberate actions. While opponents of rent stabilization triumphantly point to this study as evidence that the policy does not ‘work’, a closer analysis reveals that the causality of its shortcomings can actually be directly connected to these loopholes, combined with the aggressive investment orientation of some landlords. That all landlords do not choose to remove their properties from the market actually illustrates that it is a business model adopted by the minority. Additionally, the study’s findings on the prevention of displacement illustrate the policy’s positive impacts.

Asquith (2019) also focuses on the San Francisco rental market in his study of landlord behavior under rent control. He approaches the topic through an economic framework, asking how landlords respond to increased market demand, how price increases impact quality, and how policies that aim to shape landlord behavior impact their willingness to “supply units.” He hones in on the construction of a Silicon Valley commuter shuttle as a catalyst for increased locational demand. Like Diamond et al. (2018), he finds that landlords respond to opportunity cost by reducing their rental

housing supply. Specifically, they utilize legally permitted no-fault evictions, targeting one tenant at a time. Findings about the increase in repair permit filings suggest that owners intend to sell their buildings vacant.

When viewed through the lens of economics, tenants who wish for long-term stability in their homes are portrayed as problematic for healthy market dynamics. According to Asquith (2019), “The crux of the problem is that unlike nuisances and rent delinquents, controlled landlords *lack any direct remedy for long-stayers* (italics mine) Tenants have indeed been repeatedly found to disproportionately have long tenures in all forms of rent control...” (p 4). Additionally, he characterizes the city’s rules as “unusually stingy,” and creating an unjust financial burden for the owner. This is despite the existence of vacancy decontrol and allowances for pass-through of capital improvement costs. He suggests further research to investigate the market implications of the policy, as impacted by landlords’ ability to shrink the controlled housing stock through these tactics. The inference is that rent control is dysfunctional because it does not allow landlords to “respond to significant demand shocks” like the addition of the shuttle amenity, by “being able to use prices to allocate their units” (eg., raise rents) (p 42). The economic rhetoric of words like “allocate” obscures the lived experience of residents who are struggling to remain in their *homes*, not buy commodity goods. This framing of housing as a consumer commodity positions long-term residents as somehow deviant for wanting stability.

That the vast majority of literature on rent control is quantitative inquiry which focuses on housing stock and market economics is problematic for our understanding of the policy, and for advocacy surrounding its implementation. However, it is no surprise,

as “housing research has traditionally been concerned with measuring the extent of housing shortages and specifying its dimensions” (Kemeny, 1992, p xv). Activist and grey literature tout the policy’s benefits by using proxy measures like better educational outcomes for students with stable home environments (Pastor, Carter & Abood, 2018), but there is a dearth of research that directly examines the connections between the policy and positive outcomes, especially at the micro level. As Logan and Molotch (1987) write, “contrary to much academic debate on the subject, we hold that the material use of a place cannot be separated from psychological use” (p 20), and this connection has been seriously underdeveloped in the literature on rent control. While there is an abundance of scholarship on the mental and physical health impacts of forced mobility; ontological security in the home; place attachment, place identity, and community attachment; community participation as relates to tenure status and length, and other relevant topics, those conceptual frameworks have never been applied to research about rent-controlled housing. This deficit makes it very difficult for activists and policymakers to effectively make a case for the policy, and my research adds a much-needed tenant centered perspective to the literature.

2.3 Theoretical engagements

My research addresses the gap outlined above. It is situated amongst qualitative inquiry that uses constructs like ontological security and ‘at-homeness’ to examine the residential experience of traditional homeownership (Kearns, et al., 2000), shared-equity homeownership (Hackett, et al., 2019), unregulated private market renting (McKee, et al., 2019), public or subsidized housing (Padgett, 2007), and permanent supportive housing

(Henwood, Redline, Semborski, Rhoades, Rice & Wenzel, 2018). This approach is better suited to understanding the impacts of tenure arrangements at the micro level than research that has emerged from the field of economics, which abstracts these complex, dynamic experiences by using quantitative datasets and analysis. Moreover, the framework of ‘housing as commodity’ is in itself a problematic statement about the primacy of exchange value.

As outlined in Chapter One, this research also responds to and is inspired by Jim Kemeny’s (1992) call for a ‘sociology of residence’. Kemeny elucidated several concerns within academic housing studies, firstly that the institutionalization of power structures in the field would lead to the entrenchment of ‘abstracted empiricism’ and ‘policy-determined’ research, which would stifle critical and reflexive research. Secondly, he worried that housing research was siloed away from theoretical debates in other social sciences, and overemphasized policy, markets, and the ‘bricks and mortar’ of housing, while neglecting the broader context. While part of this critique relates to the unexamined role of political economy and power in the provision of housing and in housing ideology, it also gestures toward a need for research that looks at the lived experience of dwelling, by engaging with theory from other social science disciplines. Specifically, he wanted housing research to “become interdisciplinary, drawing explicitly on theories, concepts and debates within more than one discipline and applying these to housing in an integrative manner” (ibid, p 3).

As such, I draw on theory from a range of fields, including community psychology, environmental psychology, cultural geography and sociology. The sections below provide an overview of key concepts and literature that uses them, such as

dwelling, place attachment (and related theory), place alienation, residential alienation, and ontological security – all of which describe different aspects of the subjective lived experience, or the extent to which individuals feel at home or not at home. These theoretical constructs informed the research framing, the interview questions, and the interview analysis. I also introduce scholarship that uses the secure occupancy framework and theory around power dynamics between the landlord and tenant. These concepts were not part of the original research design, but they shed light on the role of the landlord or property manager, tenant protection policy, and other externalities which have an impact on the residential experience and sense of at-homeness.

Dwelling

The foundations of the early place literature were established by human geographers of the 1970s, most notably Tuan, Buttimer, Relph and Seamon, whose seminal writing explored the difference between the concepts of *space* and *place*. They were inspired by the philosophy of Heidegger, whose conception of dwelling (or simply ‘being in the world’) “involves the process by which a place in which we exist becomes a personal world and home” (Seamon and Mugerauer; 1985, p 8). As Saegert (1986) writes, dwelling “points to a spiritual and symbolic connection between the self and the physical world...It emphasizes the necessity for continuing active making of a place for ourselves in time and space. Simultaneously it points to the way in which our personal and social identities are shaped through the process of dwelling” (pp 287-8). In other words, dwelling is the process of *fully inhabiting* a place, and is characterized by a symbiotic relationship between dweller and place. She notes that though dwelling is often

conceptualized as occurring in the home itself, it can also be experienced at the neighborhood and city scales (among others). Broadly speaking, to dwell is to be grounded in one's lifeworld in such a way that one can reach their full human potential.

Focusing on dwelling within the home, Werner, Altman & Oxley (1986) employ a 'transactional framework' to interpret the process of attachment formation intrinsic to dwelling. They posit that there are three processes through which people can become attached to, and dwell within, their homes: (1) social rules and relationships, (2) affordances (objects and environments take on special meaning over time), and (3) appropriation practices (e.g., caretaking the home). These three are comprised of people/psychological processes, environmental properties, and time. The role of time is emphasized, and the authors identify two types of time which contribute to meaning-making: linear and cyclical. I also found this to be the case in my thesis research (2018), where participants referenced the significance of certain places in relation to one-time biographical events and/or recurring events like seasonal activities.

Korosec-Serfaty (1986) expands upon the concept of spatial appropriation as a means of joining dweller and environment. She describes the dweller as an "active subject who confers meaning upon the world but also as an individual who is acted upon by the world of which she or he is a part" (p 65). As examples of appropriation activities, Korosec-Serfaty cites ornamentation, maintenance and housework. Though she specifically focuses on housing, in keeping with Saegert's (1986) definition of dwelling, these appropriation activities can also take place on larger scales, such as neighborhood improvement projects. She also draws an important distinction between what is actually being appropriated, which is not the physical space itself, but the *meanings* and types of

relationships one establishes with the space. In other words, the process by which an apartment shifts from being a rented ‘unit’⁴ of housing in which to perform biological needs, to a home.

Place attachment, place identity, community attachment

If dwelling (or at-homeness) describes a holistic inhabiting of place, constructs like place identity, community attachment, and place attachment are both the building blocks and the outcomes of that state of being. These describe attitudes, emotions and behaviors, with respect to places and the people in them. At its most elemental, place attachment can be defined as an affective bond between people and places (Altman & Low, 1992). It is an integrating concept that involves patterns of: attachments (affect, cognition and practice); places that vary in scale, specificity and tangibility; different actors (individuals, groups, cultures); and different social relationships (ibid).

Scholarship on the person-place relationship has sought to identify different types of attachment, arising from different circumstances. Hummon's (1992) concept of ‘rootedness’ applies to individuals who "experience a strong, local sense of home and are emotionally attached to their local area" (ibid, p. 263). He identifies two types of rootedness that differ in the level of self-consciousness: everyday and ideological. Ideological rootedness entails a high level of satisfaction and attachment, combined with a highly articulated sense of place, and self-conscious identification with the community. This is usually found in mobile residents who have lived in more than one place. Everyday rootedness is more taken for granted, where the attachment to the community

⁴ I do not use the term ‘unit’ anywhere in this proposal. I believe that it reinforces the cultural belief that a rented home is less legitimate than an owned home.

and locale consists mainly of biographical associations and practical place dependence. This is more typically found with individuals who have resided in a single place for most or all of their life.

Because place functions as a conduit between the past and the present, the role of time in creating attachment is significant (Lewicka, 2014). This can take the form of an individual's biographical connection, a shared history, or even in taking an interest in the history of a new place of residence. On an individual level, personal memories embedded in place produce what is described as 'autobiographical insidedness' (Rowles, 1990). This manifests in the type of nostalgic anecdotes that most long-time residents can share while taking a walk through their neighborhood. These recollections and associations, which Lewicka (2014) calls 'episodic declarative memory' are important for personal identity and continuity. They fuse time and space together, creating place meanings that underpin attachment. Place meanings are formed by experiences and repeated social interactions, to the extent that "the very notion of place implies a conflation of space and time such that attachment to a particular place may also represent attachment to a particular time" (Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992, p 146). 'Procedural memory' is another way people bond to place through the dimension of time. In this instance, places acquire meaning through repeated use (ibid). This is theorized as one of the reasons attachment deepens with residential duration - though there is also literature that shows deep attachments are possible for shorter term residencies and even visitors.

Attachment can also be directed towards the community, which for the purposes of this research refers to a group of individuals residing in a bounded geographic location, rather than united by a shared interest or culture. Literature on community

attachment addresses the role of socially produced meanings, and how they function on a group level to reify and reproduce themselves through social interactions and individual cognition and affect. Length of tenure has been found to correlate strongly with community attachment (Trentelman, 2009), which is not surprising given that social relations tend to increase or deepen over time, and are the most consistent source of affective connection to place (Hummon, 1992; Gerson et al., 1977; Guest & Lee, 1983; Goudy, 1982).

Riger and Lavrakas (1981, c.f. Manzo and Perkins, 2006) identify two dimensions of attachment that are experienced on a group level: ‘bondedness’, or the feeling of belonging in one’s neighborhood, and ‘rootedness’ to the community. Bondedness is expressed through familiarity with neighbors, feelings of inclusion, and the number of neighborhood children known to an individual. Rootedness refers to length and type of tenure, and expected length of residency (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Over time, these intertwining features can produce ‘insidedness’, where identities are “embedded in locale and are reproduced and affirmed in daily rituals, stories, and the meaning of landscapes” (Hummon, 1992, p 258).

In Ross, Talmage & Searle’s (2020) study on predictors of sense of community, they found a positive relationship between sense of community and visiting with neighbors, exchanging favors with neighbors and length of tenure. Hiscock et al. (2000) also identified psycho-social benefits obtained by people who exchanged favors with their neighbors. Zahnow & Tsai (2021) studied the negative impacts of crime victimization on place attachment, and found that it is mediated by frequent social or functional interactions with neighbors, rather than actual friendships or family

relationships in the neighborhood. In their study on the impacts of AirBnB in a London neighborhood, Rozena & Lees (2021) found that “the transience of AirBnB guests has an affective impact on everyday socio-cultural interactions, including the ability to create meaningful home-making practices” (p 12). This research illustrates the important role relationships with neighbors play in community attachment, and thus dwelling.

Place alienation

In addition to ‘rootedness’, which consists of a strong sense of ‘home’ in tandem with emotional attachment, Hummon (1992) also identifies several types of negative or neutral attachments: (1) ‘place alienation’, in which satisfaction is low, and feelings of ‘home’, local identity and attachment are not present; (2) ‘relativity’, where satisfaction is variable, attachment is marginal, home could be anywhere, but despite all this there is a sense of local identity; and (3) ‘uncommitted placelessness’, where satisfaction is moderate, home could be anywhere or nowhere, and there is no sense of local identity or attachment. The first is most likely to be found with communities or individuals that face a large amount of social and/or material deprivation, while the last is more typical of mobile individuals.

Tuttle (2021) develops a similarly-named construct called ‘alienation from place’. This describes both a process and outcome wherein long-time residents experience their communities as something alien to them. This may be a product of social and cultural transformation due to gentrification, or it may be *alleviated* by gentrification through reduction in crime, increase in services, and other changes that may be experienced as benefits by newer and long-time residents alike. In Chicago’s historically Latino Pilsen

neighborhood, where the primary driver of change was commercial gentrification, some study participants felt *less* alienated from their neighborhood due to some of these changes. For others, witnessing sociocultural and socioeconomic change led to a declining sense of ownership and belonging, and an implied threat of displacement for their own households and/or those of other community members. Tuttle connects this anxiety to the ‘social production of space’ as theorized by Lefebvre (1991), which describes how users shape ‘space’ into ‘place’ by giving it meaning through repeated interactions, or what Lefebvre calls ‘spatial practice’. As Tuttle explains, “If place is a product of action, the conditions by which place are produced and variations in one’s sense of control over it can affect relations to it” (p 5). In other words, a perceived loss of cultural ownership can lead to feelings of alienation.

Tuttle’s (2021) alienation from place differs from Hummon’s (1992) place alienation, in that the latter presumes that feelings of home, local identity and attachment are not present at all. Conversely, Tuttle’s construct is *predicated* on the continuing existence of place attachment, theorizing that concurrent place attachment and alienation interact as “a dynamic response to neighborhood conditions and transformations” (p 3). In this conceptualization, ‘alienation from place’ cannot exist without a high degree of place attachment. For the sake of consistency with residential alienation, I use place alienation for what Tuttle describes in Pilsen and extend it to the city level in Santa Monica. Kim’s (2021) findings on evolving place attachment among longtime residents in a neighborhood in Seoul that is experiencing tourism-induced change also illustrate place alienation sentiments. They found that place attachment is dynamic and fluid, and can be positive, negative or evolve over time. Among these residents in Seoul,

attachments are attenuated by proximity to tourism hotspots and events that impact their daily lives.

The relationship between place attachment and alienation is thus informed by external factors at the meso and macro levels. This speaks to the importance of considering different scales of the home environment in attempting to understand the person-place relationship. In particular, the political landscape impacts many aspects of the life-world, such as what is built, what is demolished and who is allowed in public spaces. As Manzo (2003) writes, “Exploring the politics of place also helps us to appreciate the role of negative and ambivalent feelings and experiences in places, because often the places to which we have access, or to which we are denied access, are dictated by a larger political reality” (p 55).

Ontological security

‘Ontological security’ is a sociological theory first developed by Anthony Giddens (1991) in his book, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, among other works. . Giddens (1991) defines it as “the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of their social and material environments. Basic to a feeling of ontological security is “a sense of the reliability of persons and things” (ibid, p 50). In this sense, ontological security is trust in one’s understanding of the lifeworld, and is interdependent with the taken-for-granted routines of daily life.

The inverse of ontological security is ‘existential anxiety’, which concerns perceived threats to the integrity of the individual’s security system, and to the reliability of people and things. This is the chaos that lurks at the periphery of a sense of constancy.

In the context of housing, existential anxiety maps onto the precarity experienced in conditions of residential alienation, arising from lack of control over the home environment and fear of eviction.

Dupuis and Thorns (1998) operationalized ontological security in the context of the home. They define 'home' (versus 'housing') as a place where people feel "in control of their environment, free from surveillance, free to be themselves and at ease, in the deepest psychological sense, in a world that might at times be experienced as threatening and uncontrollable" (p 25). In this sense, the home/housing dichotomy maps onto the place/space relationship articulated by the human geographers of the 1970s. Moreover, they argue that the meanings of home are context-specific, and are thus framed by cultural values like the supremacy of homeownership in many western countries. In their model, the extent to which home provides a sense of ontological security can be assessed through its role as:

1. A source of social and material permanence and continuity
2. A space for the enactment and reproduction of everyday routines
3. An autonomous space free of surveillance
4. A source of positive self-identity and pride

The search for ontological security is an active one, and sense of security in an environment is understood through the meanings attached to it. Because these meanings are context specific and cultural and their research context is within a homeowner society, their study participants perceived renting as being riskier than owning. The second element concerns the familiar setting for routines. These are often associated with the rites and rituals of family life, and temporal events like holidays and changing seasons, which has parallels with dwelling. The third aspect, home as a site of control,

concerns the need for a refuge from the outside world and a sanctuary where one can be their true self. The fourth aspect pertains to the role of the home - specifically the owner-occupied home - in building identity and as a source of pride. The authors conclude that their research raises questions about how the meanings of home vary across different cultures (homeowner societies versus others) and tenures.

Subsequent research on housing and ontological security has utilized this framework, in some instances modifying it slightly. Kearns et al. (2000) used a framework of home as 1. a haven, 2. an autonomous space, and 3. a source of positive self-identification, to examine the experiences of homeowners and social housing renters in Scotland. They found that mediating variables like the condition of the housing and access to consumer goods are more salient than the form of tenure itself, though these two elements are more likely to be optimal within the owner-occupied home due to socioeconomic factors.

In a subsequent study, Hiscock et al. (2001) found that homeowners actually experienced less ontological security than renters who live in social housing due to the threat of foreclosure. Homeowner status correlated with differences in protection, autonomy and status derived from the home, but like the previous study, a closer look suggested that these results are more closely connected with external factors unrelated to the housing arrangement. On the topic of homeownership, they discovered a self-reinforcing dynamic, where owning acquired more importance for ontological security and sense of self-worth as it became a cultural norm. This study underscores the importance of housing ideology and policy in informing ontological security in the home,

Saegert et al. (2015, 2019) have taken up the mantle of ontological security in several of their papers about shared- or limited-equity housing. Saegert et al.'s (2015) qualitative research examined the ways in which households with a history of mortgage default view both traditional homeownership and shared equity ownership. They found that participants associated homeownership with increased ontological security and financial stability, but not when delinquency and foreclosure were discussed. Ultimately, shared equity housing was understood as a means by which to “increase ontological security by collectively sharing economic risks and responsibilities while promoting the autonomy, social status, and positive investment in place associated with homeownership” (p 299). Conversely, foreclosure threatens ontological security, as “in the context of financial and emotional instability, the home shifts from being a place of restoration and becomes a nexus of stress” (Libman, et al., 2012, p 16). As with the previously mentioned research, these findings shed light on the *actual* characteristics of ownership that facilitate ontological security, and which can be disaggregated from the strong influence of homeownership ideology.

In a subsequent study, Hackett et al. (2019) analyzed qualitative data from homeowners in a Minneapolis community land trust (CLT) to understand how the CLT's institutional framework may support ontological security. They examined how it “alters the political, social and material relations that characterize the lives of these households to facilitate the provision of previously unavailable resources” (p 27), meaning a stable material and social space in which one can act as an autonomous person. This conceptualization of ontological security is roughly aligned with aspect one of Dupuis and Thorns' (1998) original framework: home as source of social and material

permanence and continuity. The authors also evoke the theory of ‘possible selves,’ which refers to the future potential in each individual’s life trajectory. Specifically, “the history of achievement, positive sense of self and material stability that undergirded the cultivation of ontological security also set the stage for the opening up of possibility and the potential for the development of ‘possible selves’ that were related to larger life goals” (p 41).

The theoretical construct of possible selves provides a useful framework for understanding how certain conditions and tenure arrangements might enable or restrict the realization of one’s goals and aspirations. Markus and Nurius’ original (1986) conceptualization encompasses an individual’s idea of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming. It serves as a ‘cognitive bridge’ between the past, present and future, and illuminates how individuals may change from what they are now to what they will become. According to Markus and Nurius (1986), the study of possible selves is also the study of how individuals interpret and *make meaning* of their conditions and position in the world. This is shaped by social context (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2005), and “normative, non-normative, and historical forces that become integrated into the self and motivate behavior in the present” (Frazier & Hooker, 2005, p 42). This is to say that both institutional arrangements (like policy) *and* self-concept, as formed by sociocultural forces and personal history, play a role in one’s assessment of possible selves.

When ontological security is considered vis a vis the home environment it shares some key characteristics with dwelling. However, they are not the *same* (see Table 1). Instead, one could say that the two have a mutually reinforcing relationship. For one,

ontological security is a broad concept that encompasses trust and confidence in the world as a whole (Giddens, 1991). As a holistic concept, it is comprised of many aspects, including health, relationships, finances, career and housing (ibid). When applied specifically to the residence, ontological security pertains to a cognitive state that is the outcome of the realization of supportive material conditions like control and autonomy (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998), living in a ‘good’ neighborhood (Hiscock et al., 2000), and the financial stability and sustainability of the housing arrangement (Saegert, et al., 2015). Likewise, having ‘bad’ neighbors was found to undermine ontological security (ibid; Cheshire, Easthope & Have, 2021).

Dwelling is not informed by conscious aspects like trust, confidence and decision-making. It describes the preconscious conditions of the individual’s relationship with and experience of their lifeworld (Saegert, 1986), as constructed and reified by the emotions, cognitions and behaviors of attachment (Altman & Low, 1992). Dwelling in the residence is connected with the ability to integrate one’s self into the environment through appropriation practices, which is similar to the ‘autonomy’ element of ontological security (Kearns et al., 2000). Autonomy supports the articulation of one’s identity, and is understood as the “*freedom to and freedom from*, that is the freedom to do what one wants and to express oneself and the freedom from any need to have one’s actions approved by others...” (ibid, p 389). The key difference is, with dwelling, spatial appropriation both indicates and cultivates a certain state of being within the home environment (Korosec-Serfaty, 1986), whereas with ontological security the significance of appropriation is in the *control* over conditions (Kerns et al., 2000). In this sense,

ontological security can enhance the experience of dwelling and ‘at-homeness’ by providing a sense of stability.

Table 1: Comparison between dwelling and ontological security

<i>Dwelling</i>	<i>Ontological Security</i>
<p>Similar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sense of being ‘at home’ -Home as haven and source of autonomy cultivated through appropriation (e.g. caretaking, decoration) -Meaning-making (symbolic, emotional) -Supports realization of possible selves -Established through space-time routine <p>Different</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sense of being-in-the-world (integrative, pre-cognitive) -Affective -The dweller shapes the environment and visa versa -Unconscious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sense of being ‘at home’ -Home as haven and source of autonomy cultivated through control afforded by tenure characteristics - Meaning-making (from conditions) -Supports realization of possible selves -Established through space-time routine <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reliability of the world, people, and things (interpretive, rational) -Cognitive -Related to sociocultural and material conditions -Context-specific (e.g. homeowner society) -Active search for/awareness of

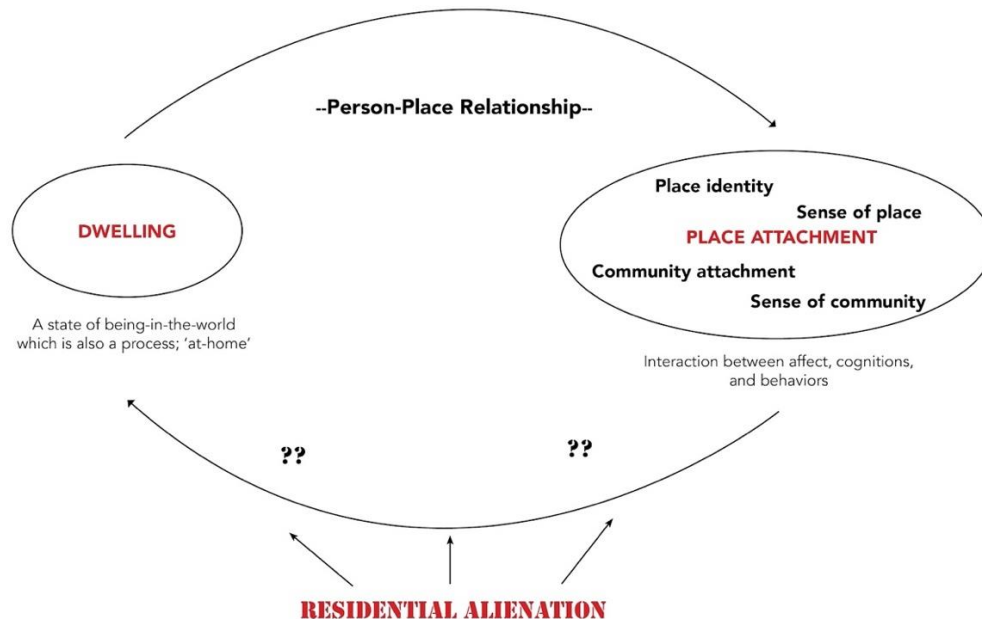
Secure occupancy

While conducting this research I learned of a related body of literature in the Australian context that uses the framework of ‘secure occupancy’ (Hulse, Milligan & Easthope, 2011; Hulse & Milligan, 2014; Easthope, 2014; Morris, 2018; Hulse, Morris & Pawson, 2021) to understand the experiences of residents of the country’s Private Rental Sector (PRS). With the addition of a paper about ‘residential alienation’ among young renters in the United Kingdom (McKee, et al., 2019), this literature is the only other research I am aware of that examines the experience of private market renters and ‘at-homeness’. It also understands ontological security as a foundational element of being ‘at-home’.

Prior to discovering this literature, my posited relationship between the theoretical constructs was as depicted in Figure 3. In this conceptualization, dwelling and the place

attachment elements were distinctive but mutually reinforcing concepts forming the person-place relationship, while the effects of residential alienation were unknown. This ‘new’ literature identifies important external factors that inform both the person-place relationship *and* residential alienation.

Figure 3: Original posited relationship between dwelling, place attachment, and residential alienation



‘Secure occupancy’ is defined as “the nature of occupancy by households of residential dwellings and the extent to which households can make a home and stay there for reasonable periods of time if they wish to do so, provided that they meet their tenancy obligations” (Hulse et al., 2011, p 20). The authors theorize that it is informed by interactions between market, legal, social policy (e.g., housing subsidies) and sociocultural factors. This is the framework from which I developed Group One of

factors (*security, insecurity, and the residential experience*), as outlined in the previous chapter. Like other studies mentioned previously, Hulse, et al. 's (2011) inquiry starts from the position that renting is assumed to have negative effects on wellbeing. They pose the question of whether this outcome is intrinsic to actual characteristics of renting, or a reflection of cultural norms about renting in homeowner societies. They compare the aforementioned elements in eight different local contexts to develop four typologies of renting, which ostensibly produce different residential experiences. With some exceptions, the American context is most similar what they found in their review of conditions in New Jersey, Ontario, Flanders and Australia:

“A leading and lightly regulated private rental sector with limited provisions for secure occupancy that is structurally separated from a small and strongly regulated social housing sector, which provides for much greater secure occupancy” (ibid, p 182).

In addition to identifying the role of these external factors in shaping the residential experience, this inquiry also looks at how actual conditions and/or the perception of security impacts the individual household. To this effect, Hulse and Milligan (2014) adopt van Gelder’s (2010) tripartite model of security of tenure to differentiate between legal policy, lived experience and material conditions, and perception:

- *De jure security* = Embedded in property rights and the legal rules that underpin a lease arrangement.
- *De facto security* = Actually occurring. Informed by aspects like the ability to continue paying rent, the motivations and behaviors of the landlord/manager, and rental housing management practices.
- *Perceptual security* = Sense of security as experienced by the occupant. This can be influenced by landlord/manager behavior and past experiences, but also by external sources like the media or knowledge of the rental market.

In their book, *The Private Rental Sector in Australia: Living With Uncertainty*, Morris, et al. (2021) explore renter perceptions and behaviors in-depth, to understand how people who rent their homes experience and respond to insecurity of tenure. They found that tenants use strategies of avoidance, both in reporting maintenance issues for fear of appearing to be a ‘troublesome tenant’ and in managing anxiety about precarity. Overall, however, “while private renters develop some strategies to adapt to their situation on a daily basis such that insecurity is often only ‘at the back of the mind’, all perceive lack of control over their housing futures” (p 129). Long-term renters⁵ and seniors exhibited three common patterns in interpreting their situations: 1. Insecurity is always a concern on some level, but you learn to live with it. In some cases this includes developing a contingency plan, 2. Constantly feeling insecure, which has a high impact on wellbeing, and 3. Valuing the flexibility of renting, which includes both less responsibility than owning and access to areas that are unaffordable for ownership.

‘Constructive coping’ refers to how people make conscious choices about how to best achieve wellbeing and stability, rather than viewing them as passive and dependent. Hulse, et al., (2019) use this framework to understand renter households’ decisions about renting, but it can be applied to explain behaviors around maintenance and other aspects of the residential experience as well. In their study, they found that renters “use a form of constructive coping, such as they are able to make a home and belong to a neighborhood...” (p 183). In this sense, constructive coping is a way to reach

⁵ Defined as households who have rented for 10 years or more, though not necessarily in the same place. Different from my definition of 20 or more years in the same home.

the level of ontological security needed to inhabit the home environment in a dwelling capacity.

Power in the landlord-tenant relationship

The power dynamic between landlord and tenant is central to the residential experience. Morris et al., (2021) describe this as a

“...power relationship which occurs in the context of different rental market contexts, develops through day to day practices, and is suffused with cultural norms about renting, being a tenant and being a landlord. Cultural norms are embedded in and transferred through the language that we use: we own a home but rent a house.” (p 133)

Chisholm, Howden-Chapman, and Fougere’s (2020) work on the role of power in the landlord-tenant relationship expands on this theorization. They draw on the ‘secure occupancy’ framework and on Lukes’ (2004) conceptualization of power dynamics within interpersonal relationships to identify three dimensions of power:

- First dimension: *visible power* - People are dissatisfied with conditions and attempt to change these. Conflicts in interest are clearly observable.
- Second dimension: *hidden power* - People are dissatisfied with conditions, but there is no visible conflict. Conflicts in interest are hidden.
- Third dimension: *invisible power* - People appear satisfied with conditions that are objectively dissatisfactory. Conflicts of interest are invisible. (ibid, p 145)

Chisholm et al. (2020) cite an extensive body of literature that illustrates how “tenants that reported housing quality problems found it a stressful experience, with repairs taking a long time to be carried out, or not carried out at all” (p 146). Retaliatory eviction or worsening relations with the landlord/manager were an outcome for some

respondents. This connects to Hulse et al.'s (2021) findings on the importance of avoiding a 'troublesome tenant' reputation. They argue that for the 20% of their respondents who avoid reporting needed maintenance or complaining about landlord inaction, this behavior "can be seen as a manifestation of a power imbalance between landlords and tenants" (ibid, p 146).

This is also supported by Byrne and McArdle's (2020) findings on the "complex, messy and multidimensional everyday relationship between landlord and tenant which shapes tenants' experience of security and their choices" experienced by PRS renters in Ireland. They use the 'secure occupancy' framework to examine the interaction of security, tenants' agency and the landlord-tenant power dynamic. They conclude that landlords maintain *true* ownership over the dwelling by exerting control over various aspects, while tenants seek to avoid conflict, both for the potential consequences and associated stress.

Residential alienation

The experience of feeling 'not-at-home' in one's residence is what Peter Marcuse (1975) referred to as 'residential alienation'. He uses this theoretical construct to describe the condition of the typical low- or middle-income renter in America, and 'alienated housing' to describe the structure itself. This framework was developed in response to what he described as a 'shelter theory of housing', where policy initiatives focus exclusively on the 'brick and mortar' aspects of the provision of housing, while ignoring the subtle complexities of what makes a stable and nurturing home environment. In this sense, the concept of residential alienation (though it came earlier) can be connected to

Kemeny's (1992) critique of housing scholarship as overly focused on the housing stock itself, while ignoring the lived experience of its occupants and the intersectionality of housing with other contextual aspects.

Inspired by Marx's theory of 'alienated labor', Marcuse (1975) connected residential alienation to other forms of alienation intrinsic to modern life. It is positioned in opposition to Hegel's conceptualization of three ways to take possession of a thing: a. by directly grasping it, b. by forming it, and c. by merely marking it as one's. In this sense, the ideal home environment is one where the occupant can confirm and realize their sense of self, or *dwell*. To this end, Marcuse (1975) proposes three characteristics of alienated housing:

1. The inability of a person to form, to shape, his/her own dwelling, to express his/her individuality in it
2. The subjection of the individual's dwelling to the control of alien outside powers
3. The inability to mark or symbolically manifest the individual's ownership in his/her dwelling

In his original framing these are mainly expressive freedoms, but the subjugation of control to outside powers can mean a range of things, from landlord harassment to physical deterioration from deferred maintenance. In their book, *In Defense of Housing* (an instant classic in housing justice circles), Madden and Marcuse (2016) expand upon Marcuse's original definition of residential alienation and position it as an outcome of the hyper-commodification of housing. They broadly define alienation as "estrangement, objectification, or othering," and argue if we want to understand the consequences of the hyper-commodification of housing, "we need to understand the alienated psychosocial experience - the stress, anxiety and disempowerment - that the current housing system

produces” (ibid, p 56). In this newer incarnation, residential alienation is the experience of feeling unsettled in one’s residence. This may be cultivated by excessive rules, habitability issues, or forced mobility. Residential alienation is the severance of one of the most basic human impulses - to make a home - from the ability to do so. It represents “the painful, at times traumatic, experience of a divergence between home and housing” (ibid, p 60).

Though inquiry that explicitly uses the residential alienation framework is surprisingly minimal, the outcomes of housing precarity and forced mobility discussed at the beginning of the chapter describe many of the same outcomes. Citing a dearth of research about private-market renting in the U.K, McKee, et al. (2019) use residential alienation as the theoretical framework for their qualitative study on the experiences of young, low-income renters. They found evidence of residential alienation in the form of 1. powerlessness, insecurity and alienation, 2. unaffordable housing and financial stress (intertwined with the labor market), and 3. status anxiety, stigma and pressure to convey the identity of being the ‘good tenant’.

These were experienced through elements like the power imbalance of the landlord/tenant relationship, unsustainable rent increases, the fear of eviction, and incompatible housemate situations. Their research “highlights only too clearly the negative psychosocial impacts of residing in the (private rental sector),” and how “living with insecure, precarious, expensive housing took significant tolls on people’s well-being and mental health” (p 15). They conclude that the residential alienation framework enables scholars to transcend local context, and illuminate pervasive systemic challenges

faced by low-income households, particularly in places where homeownership dominates and there are few protections for renters.

Research on the experience of homelessness has engaged the residential alienation framework in several instances. Černá, Kubala & Ripka's (2019) evaluation of Brno's (Czech Republic) Housing First program suggests that the issue of formerly houseless families being chronically arrears on their rent cannot be explained entirely by individual financial circumstances or systemic factors. They propose that the inability to form attachments to the home, created by the conditions of residential alienation as elucidated above, could also be a factor. Research on the experience of houseless women with children in a transitional housing program (Fogel, 1997) evoked residential alienation as a framework to understand how lack of control over the home environment negatively impacted respondents. Specifically, the women "related stories of displeasure with landlords and problems with the places where they were living. They reported having maintenance requests ignored and being told they could not hang pictures or paint the walls" (p 126). Thus residential alienation threatens to undermine ontological security, and by extension, potentially diminish the ability to dwell in one's residence.

Chapter Three: Research Design

This research is an explanatory case study, which means that it examines posited causality within the case. The case study methodology was selected because it is well-suited to research questions where the boundary between the phenomenon (the residential experience under rent control) and the context (Santa Monica) are not clearly defined (Yin, 2003). As outlined in the first chapter, the purpose of this study is to contribute to our understanding of the impacts of tenant protections vis a vis the lived experience of individuals who live with them. This approach offers a much-needed alternative to abstract, quantitative inquiry that has mostly emerged from the field of economics. The research's objective is to understand the ways and extent to which renters residing in Santa Monica's rent-controlled housing experience 'dwelling' and 'residential alienation', as indicated by the relationship they have with their home environment; how these relationships intersect with tenant protections; and how things have changed since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The research questions are:

1. To what extent do renters experience feeling 'at home' (*dwelling*) or 'not at home' (*residential alienation*), and what factors contribute to those experiences?
2. What is the nexus between those experiences and tenant protections?
 - a. Does knowledge and/or deployment of protections contribute to a sense of stability and dwelling?
 - b. Do tenant protections result in material outcomes that contribute to a sense of stability and dwelling?
 - c. Are these protections or their outcomes a consideration in behaviors like caretaking and community engagement?
3. How have these experiences changed since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic?

In asking these questions about the residential experience in this policy context, the findings will also inevitably offer insight into the efficacy of tenant protections in Santa Monica specifically. Though that is *not* the primary research objective, focus, or object of study, these findings will likely be of interest to residents and policymakers in Santa Monica, as well as tenant activists, scholars, and policymakers in other locales, for whom Santa Monica has served as an exemplar of strong rent control policy. Having been born and raised in Santa Monica and the surrounding area, this holds personal interest for me as well.

3.1 Positionality

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe the qualitative researcher as a ‘bricoleur’, or producer of a pieced-together work, such as a quilt or a film montage. As a documentary filmmaker and editor, this last metaphor is especially resonant for me. They characterize montage as the art of creating “the sense that images, sounds, and understandings are blending together, overlapping, forming a composite, a new creation. The images seem to shape and define one another, and an emotional, gestalt effect is produced” (p. 4). In this sense the bricoleur is creating an interpretive whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. This is a role of power, responsibility, and accountability. In qualitative research, the montage effect is achieved by moving from the personal to the political, and from the local to the historical (ibid). Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe these binaries as ‘dialogical texts’, which presume an active reader/audience and strive to avoid turning the ‘other’ into the object of the social science gaze. As such, the interpretive bricoleur understands that research is intrinsically shaped by their own personal history and

identity, and by those of the participants (ibid). Thus, acknowledging my positionality in this research contributes to the trustworthiness of the results.

I am an able-bodied, straight, 40-year-old white woman, with a graduate degree and a savings account. I live on a very small income and I rent my home, but I do not experience economic precarity in the same way that many renters do, nor the added challenges of a marginalized identity. At the same time, I have held over seventy jobs (including low-paid, gig economy, quasi-legal, and manual labor), have always been a low-income single earner household, and have never considered myself a part of the mainstream of American society. This is owing more to my values and lifestyle than how I might present to a gatekeeper type, to whom I probably seem like a conventional, educated white lady. Like many women, I was raised to smile, act differential, and try to avoid conflict whenever possible, which sometimes feels deeply at odds with the way I would like to express myself. In my view, this is probably the most complex part of my identity, and also something I have been able to use to my advantage in accessing spaces of power with subversive intent.

My awareness of tenants' rights starts with some of my earliest memories. I was born in "the People's Republic of Santa Monica" in the summer of 1981. My parents were both nearly forty, and I was their first and only child. Both of my parents had been leading what one would describe in that time period as a bohemian life, with progressive values that were often incongruent with their middle class upbringings in Kansas City and Washington D.C. Shortly after moving to California in 1977, my mother became the first volunteer coordinator for the fledgling SMRR, which was waging an aggressive campaign to implement rent control by local ballot measure. She was galvanized by an

epidemic of condominium conversions that posed a threat to the city's large population of seniors, which also resulted in my parent's eviction from their rented beach-front home. This led her to testify in front of City Council in support of a moratorium on conversions, with a flower tucked behind her ear.

My parents separated when I was almost three years old, and neither of them remarried. My mother and I lived in a house they jointly owned in Venice, from that time until I left for college at age eighteen. My father lived in the same rent stabilized Santa Monica apartment building for over 30 years. His residence in the city gave me access to public schools that were considered to be of much higher quality than those by our Venice home. Though I had friends who lived in apartments, throughout my childhood I took the experience of living in a home we owned for granted. At the same time, I did not have the suburban upbringing typical of many white people of my generation. This is something I am deeply thankful for, and has been intrinsic to how I understand the world.

Venice was a diverse area comprising several neighborhoods, with substantial Black and Latino populations. Specifically, the Oakwood neighborhood was one of the only places Black families could own property on the westside of Los Angeles for much of the twentieth century, so there was (and still is to a lesser extent) a multi-generational Black community in that area with a rich history. Additionally, migration from central Mexico in the late 1980s and early 1990s expanded the Latino community, and in particular the Oaxaqueño community from the state of Oaxaca. Venice also has a history of being an artist enclave, and is home to the famous Venice Boardwalk. Though Venice has a vibrant history and culture, my neighborhood also suffered the ravages of gang violence during the crack-cocaine epidemic of the late 1980s and early 1990s. During this

time Venice was known as “the slum by the sea”, and people would actively avoid the area. I vividly remember that Domino’s pizza had a policy of only delivering to certain sections of the neighborhood after dark, and my house made the cut by about a half block.

Returning to Los Angeles in my early 20s, I found a cheap apartment in the Sunset Junction area of Silver Lake, which was in mid-stage gentrification. The neighborhood was a mix of low-income immigrant families, ‘creatives’, white collar professionals, and longtime LGBTQ residents, and this diversity was evident in the variety of businesses on Sunset Boulevard. Almost all of the residents in my sixteen apartment 1928 building were Latino families, crowded into studios the same size as mine. The building was rent-stabilized, and I paid \$690 when I moved in and \$820 when I moved out nine years later. Over those years I saw the neighborhood change significantly, while most of the families in my building remained. I moved to Portland in early 2014, and have lived in my Kenton rental home since then. Shortly after moving to Portland and learning about the dearth of tenant rights protections, I started volunteering with the Community Alliance of Tenants, where I worked on the renters’ rights hotline and then spent the summer of 2016 as the hotline supervisor. Over these two years I talked to hundreds of renters who were deeply stressed, scared, and whose life was in upheaval.

In the summer of 2018, I began splitting my time between Los Angeles and Portland due to my mother’s terminal illness. I decided to use this time as an opportunity to support tenant activist efforts to pass Proposition 10, and I began interviewing and photographing people in the area who lived in rent-controlled homes. Based on what I

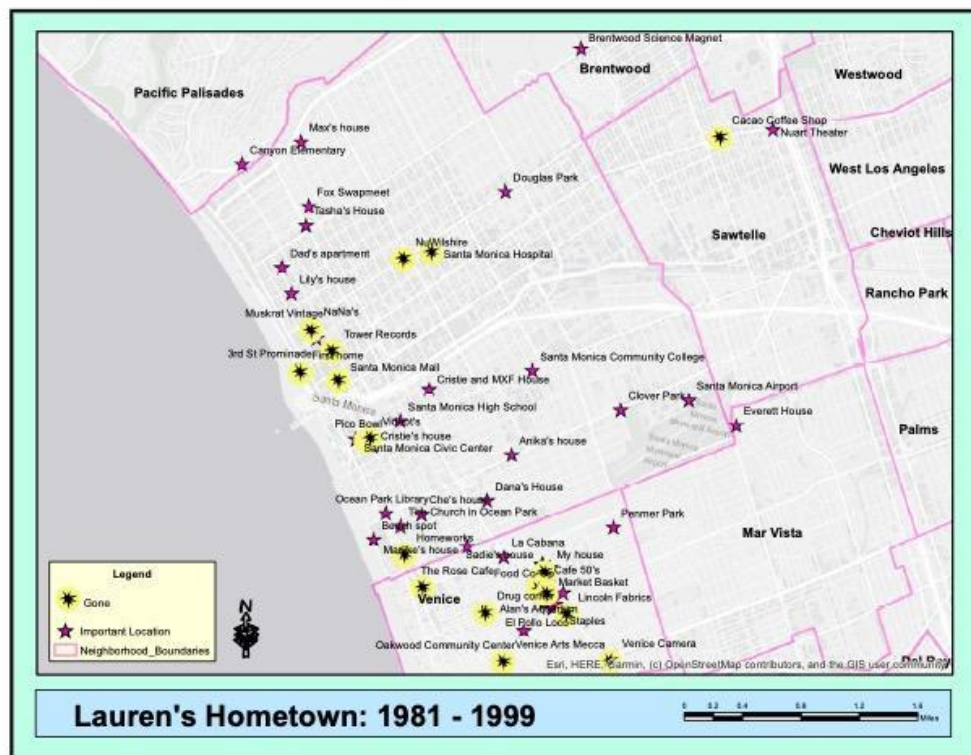
learned from this project, it was obvious there was an important human element of the rent control debate that was being completely missed in both academic research and popular discourse about the policy. Project participants reported a wide range of positive benefits they attributed directly to the rent control, ranging from a holistic sense of stability, to financial savings that were substantial enough to allow for a career change or return to school.

Around this time I began to consider Dr. Karen Gibson's suggestion of returning to the Urban Studies program to get my doctorate, and this project felt like the seed of a dissertation topic. I also began volunteering with Portland Tenants United (PTU) on their Organizing Committee, to join the fight for stronger renter protections, and be involved in housing justice on a deeper level than I had up to that point. After that I became PTU's delegate to the Autonomous Tenant Union Network (ATUN) of North America, where I have had the privilege of learning about tenant struggles and organizing strategies from people across the US and Canada.

My mother passed away in early November of 2018. The house I grew up in was torn down earlier that year, my beloved childhood neighborhood diner closed, and the places where I grew up are now the two most expensive rental markets in the Los Angeles area. I am forever priced out of my home environment, which has changed beyond recognition (see Figure 4). My embodied understanding of change, my own deep feelings of attachments to different places, and my empathy toward others' experiences is the foundation of all my academic and creative work. I draw from my personal experiences and emotions to understand and empathize with my participants. When I interview a renter, it is with the lived experience of precarity inherent in all tenancies. At

the same time, I also acknowledge that everyone’s individual context is *different* from mine: they might have more or less power, knowledge, and resources with which to navigate their circumstances. Their households, housing histories, and identities are not the same. This balance between finding common ground while acknowledging difference is key to my approach as a researcher, artist, and activist.

Figure 4: Map of important and no longer existing locations in my lifeworld



3.2 Epistemology

As outlined previously, this research responds to, and is inspired by, Jim Kemeny’s (1992) call for a ‘sociology of residence’. Perhaps not coincidentally, Kemeny studied under and was heavily influenced by Anthony Giddens, who along with Norbert Elias developed structuration theory, of which ‘ontological security’ (see literature

review) is a component. In an interview, Kemeny explained that his initial inspiration behind the call for this epistemological shift toward a sociology of residence (rather than the study of housing) was his own personal experience as a renter in Sweden in the 1970s, which contrasted sharply with his experiences as a tenant in the UK, the US and Australia. He wanted to understand *why* the experiences were so different, and was unable to find relevant scholarship about tenure in the housing literature of the time (Allen, 2005). In answering this call for a sociology of residence, my research is not concerned with macro housing market economics, policy comparison, or other abstracted forms of analysis. Instead, it follows the core philosophical tenet of phenomenology, by going “back to the things themselves” (Husserl, 2001, p 168). Like Kemeny, I reflect on my own experiences as a renter as a way to ground myself in the subject.

My research approach also embraces the Los Angeles Tenants Union’s (LATU) call for discourse that centers the tenant (or resident), rather than the physical housing itself. Their critique of mainstream housing rhetoric concerns the use of terms like ‘unit’ paired with large quantitative data sets, which obscure both the lived realities of the housing’s inhabitants and the role of power in shaping the residential experience. Viewed through this lens, “We don’t have a housing crisis. We have a tenants’ rights crisis (Rosenthal, 2019, p 51).

These two mandates for a fundamental shift of frame demand that we consider renters’ *lived experience*, and the phenomenological approach is well suited to the task. Phenomenology was devised by German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), who coined the term ‘life-world’ to address the crisis of modern science, which he saw as plagued by a tendency toward idealization and abstraction that disambiguated the subject

from its origin in the world of lived experience. Phenomenology is a complex construct that exists simultaneously as an epistemology, methodological foundation, sociological paradigm, and research practice (Eberle, 2014). As a philosophy of research, it holds that the subjective consciousness and its implications are just as worthy of inquiry as the empirical facts and generalizations sought by positivist experimental research (ibid). Thus the epistemological foundations of the phenomenological approach represent a fundamental departure from research that aims to establish definitive conclusions about an objective reality (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2033). As Cal & Tehmarn (2016) write, “the aim of phenomenology is to study an individual’s lived experience rather than finding a universal truth or generalization of a phenomenon” (p 2).

3.3 Methodology and methods

In its most basic definition, a case study is “the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system” (Creswell, 2007, p73). It entails the inclusion of multiple sources of information, such as observations, interviews, audiovisuals, documents and reports, participant observations and physical artifacts (Yin, 2003). Case studies are often the preferred method when; "how" or "why" questions are being posed; the researcher is not attempting to control events as in the case of an experimental design; and the topic is a contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2008). The need to conduct a case study may arise when the boundaries between a phenomenon and its context are not clear, and contextual conditions “might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study (Yin, 2003, p13). My research design is what Stake (1995, c.f. Creswell, 2007) calls a ‘single instrumental case study,’ wherein the researcher focuses on an issue or concern, and chooses one bounded case to illustrate it. It is also an

‘explanatory’ case study, as it starts with a theoretical proposition (the presence of rent control likely increases stability and wellbeing for residents) that shapes the data collection plan, and asks questions of ‘how’ and ‘why’ (Yin, 2008). The unit of analysis (Yin, 2003) is the lived experience of 30 interview participants who reside in rent-controlled homes in Santa Monica.

Data sources

Because tenants’ lived experience is centered in this inquiry, the primary data source is 30 in-depth, semi-structured interviews. As case studies draw on a number of data sources for triangulation (Yin, 2003), the interviews are augmented by additional materials. The function of these supporting sources is to provide the rich contextual situating (meso and macro level) necessary for understanding the individual residential experience (micro level). Gathering and reviewing the data outlined in Chapters Four and Five (see Table 2) was a valuable tool that enabled me to connect the experiences discussed in the interviews to external events and conditions, during both the interview itself and in the analysis. In addition to summarizing relevant context, Chapters Four and Five include themes and hypotheses about how these themes may manifest in findings from the interview analysis.

After completing the context and interview findings chapters (Chapters Four through Seven) I synthesized themes from both to identify the two groups of factors that impact dwelling and develop the concept map. This process was informed by the secure occupancy framework, in recognition of the impact of larger drivers such as the housing market and policy on the individual’s sense of ‘home’ in their residence. This

triangulation strategy serves to establish ‘trustworthiness’ in the analysis of the interviews (Shenton, 2003).

Table 2: Supporting data sources for triangulation

What	Why
An historical review of tenant policies and activism in Santa Monica, drawing from archival news media articles and academic papers and books.	To provide regional sociopolitical context with respect to these tenant protections and their evolution. This context was relevant in interpreting interviews with participants in long-term tenancies. I also theorized that knowledge of the macro-level political landscape may contribute to how much the participant feels at home.
Current government-authored materials on city tenant protection policies, initiatives and resources, such as websites and FAQs.	To provide a holistic understanding of the tenant protection landscape, and what information is readily available to the public. This was useful in understanding participant knowledge of tenant protections.
Tenant education periodicals and mandatory public notices from the rent control board, membership organizations like Santa Monicans for Renters Rights, and relevant city bureaus from summer 2019 through summer 2021.	To understand what information tenants <i>receive</i> about their rights. This differs from the above source in that these materials are actively distributed to tenants. This also informed understanding participant knowledge in aggregate.
The Apartment Association of Greater Los Angeles’ (AAGLA) monthly magazine, <i>Apartment Age</i> , for the past two years.	To provide insight into the discourse of the multifamily housing industry in the Los Angeles area, which has a theorized impact on the residential experience.
Interviews with tenant attorneys, advocates and City employees who interface with tenants in crisis. (six individuals)	To get a sense of some of the most common issues tenants seek assistance for, both pre-COVID and during COVID.
A snapshot of multifamily housing sales listings on Loopnet from one week (August 9, 2021).	To provide insight into how multifamily housing is marketed and what that suggests about new owners’ business models, which has a theorized impact on the residential experience.

3.4 Participants and Recruitment

Participant criteria

Though qualitative research with a relatively small pool of participants does not typically require a statistically representative sample more germane to generalizable quantitative studies (Troost, 1986), it is still necessary to be strategic in choosing participants. Accordingly, participants were selected for demographic variation in race, ethnicity, and age; length of tenure (at least three years in the current home); immigrant status (participants were *not* asked about their legal standing), household size and income level. All interested parties were asked to fill out a screening questionnaire to enable strategic selection. The maximum income threshold was set at \$100,000 annually, which approximates the area median household income of \$92,490 (US Census Bureau, 2019). Setting an income threshold enhances understanding of policy impact because tenants who have high incomes also have greater housing choice and are less likely to experience precarity. Participants were also asked if they live in rent-controlled housing and asked if they feel that they know what rent control is or does on a basic level (yes/no answer). This was necessary for answering interview questions around research question two, which examines the nexus between the residential experience and policy.

Because time is an intrinsic component of dwelling (Werner, Altman & Oxley, 1986) and plays an important role in place attachment (Hummon, 1992; Lewicka, 2014; Rowles, 1990), it was necessary to require a minimum duration of tenure. My review of the literature did not identify any recommendations for minimum length of tenure, however, the majority of renters in rent stabilized housing in Santa Monica have moved

within the last three years (Santa Monica Rent Control Board, 2020), so I selected three years as the minimum length of tenancy. This allows time for participants to potentially get to know neighbors and the neighborhood and have a number of interactions with the landlord or property manager. It also provides insight into the differences between pre-COVID and pandemic experiences.

I had to edit my questionnaire several times as the responses were received. After mistakenly interviewing several individuals who live in income-based housing (rather than private-market), I amended the question about living in rent controlled housing to clarify that it “does not include Section 8, Community Corporation, and other income-based housing” for the purposes of my study. I also added a question asking if the apartment building was owned by a family member or close friend, after I interviewed an individual who turned out to be a landlord-resident on the property. There were a total of 66 responses to the questionnaire, not including a number of responses that I determined to be fraudulent. I also interviewed one of these individuals, eventually realizing that they did not actually live in Santa Monica or hold knowledge about it. Adding the question about a family member or close friend owning the building made it easy to filter out these responses, as these individuals tended to answer ‘yes’, probably assuming an affirmative answer was a study criterion. Of these 66 legitimate responses, four were disqualified due to incomes far above the threshold. Additionally, a number of individuals who filled out the recruitment questionnaire did not respond to my subsequent communications. In the end, almost all qualified participants who responded were interviewed.

Recruitment

Recruitment began in early March and was conducted on a rolling basis throughout the two month interview period (late March - late May 2021). I composed several recruitment documents that included information about the study's objectives and participant criteria. In the communications directed toward participants (versus service providers and other gatekeepers) I identified myself as a renter, tenant organizer and Santa Monican. This information was important for transparency, and for the cultivation of trust. Thanks to funding provided by the Toulan School, I was able to offer participants \$15 gift cards to one of two local businesses. I used the following outlets for recruitment:

Social media: I joined several Santa Monica-focused Facebook groups, including my high school and middle school alumni groups, *Ask, Borrow, Give*, and *Santa Monica Now*. I posted on each of these several times during the recruitment process, and updated my participant criteria to reflect the demographics that were thus far underrepresented in the participant pool (e.g., Black, immigrant, men, etc.). There was a significant amount of anti-rent control sentiment shared in the comments section of my post in the Lincoln Middle School page in particular, which I am regrettably not permitted to excerpt due to an expectation of privacy in private groups.

Civic groups: The Pico Neighborhood Association (PNA) is a long-time, city-funded neighborhood organization in an area with a higher percentage of low-income and minority residents than other parts of the city. I briefly presented on my research and

recruitment at a PNA meeting, and recruited at least one participant through that channel. I was not able to connect with the Ocean Park Association (OPA) or any of the other neighborhood associations, as my emails and Facebook messages were not answered.

My personal network: I posted on my own personal Facebook page and also asked one friend directly if he would be interested in participating. In total I interviewed two friends and one of my dad's friends. I also drew on my parents' connections to receive coverage in The Church in Ocean Park's newsletter and on SMRR's Facebook page (their next newsletter was not going to be released within the recruitment timeframe). This included several long-time SMRR leaders vouching for me on social media.

Snowball sampling: I asked participants to tell friends and neighbors about the study, and a few participants were recruited in this manner.

Posting flyers in high-traffic areas: In early March I flew to Los Angeles to visit a friend and spent a day posting 8.5 x 11 flyers up in areas that have high levels of pedestrian traffic. Though the Los Angeles area experienced a major COVID surge earlier that winter and I worried that people would still be mostly indoors, I found that not to be the case. A SMRR volunteer provided me with a list of apartments with a large percentage of long-term tenants, as well as some local businesses that would be good locations for posting the information. After observing that a flyer I posted outside an apartment was removed within an hour, I refocused my strategy to focus on a. businesses that have bulletin boards, b. public boards at libraries and parks, and c. electrical poles and other infrastructure with high visibility on commercial thoroughfares.

In the course of about seven hours I visited every single neighborhood in Santa Monica with the exception of the area north of Montana Boulevard, which mostly consists of owner-occupied single-family homes. I concentrated on Pico Boulevard, Wilshire Boulevard, Main Street and Ocean Avenue, as well as some select adjacent locations. For the most part no one asked what I was doing, though one person read the flyer as I was taping it to a pole by Palisades Park (see Figure 5) and thanked me for my work. The flyer is in Appendix A.

Figure 5: Recruitment flyer in Palisades Park



Targeted mass mailing of recruitment letter: Using a data set from the Santa Monica Rent Control Office that contains the Maximum Allowable Rent (MAR), address, and move-in date for each rent stabilized apartment in the city, I mailed participation invitation letters to 350 households. Because the MAR database does *not* include the move-in date for tenancies that began before January 1999, I sorted that

portion of the dataset by rent level and used that as a proxy for duration. I sent 300 letters to households with tenancies that began before that date, divided evenly between the lowest rents and rents in the mid-range. I sent 50 each to studio apartments and one bedroom apartments, and 100 each to two and three bedroom apartments. I weighed the distribution toward apartments with more bedrooms because I wanted families and/or roommates in addition to single people or couples. I also sent 50 letters to households who moved in between 2000 and 2010.

Limitations of this recruitment process

The \$15 interview incentive is less than is standard for some studies with interviews of this length and is not offered in cash or the equivalent. This decision was intentional, and aimed to strike a balance between honoring participants' time while still ensuring that the financial incentive was not the only reason for participation. Without a larger cash incentive this project will likely hold little appeal for a person who has never reflected on the experience of living in this housing and/or does not find it an interesting topic or have any opinions on the subject. While this may be viewed as a limitation as it does skew the participant pool to an extent, it can also be seen as a positive aspect in that participants may be more readily able to engage in these topics than someone whose participation is purely motivated by a cash incentive.

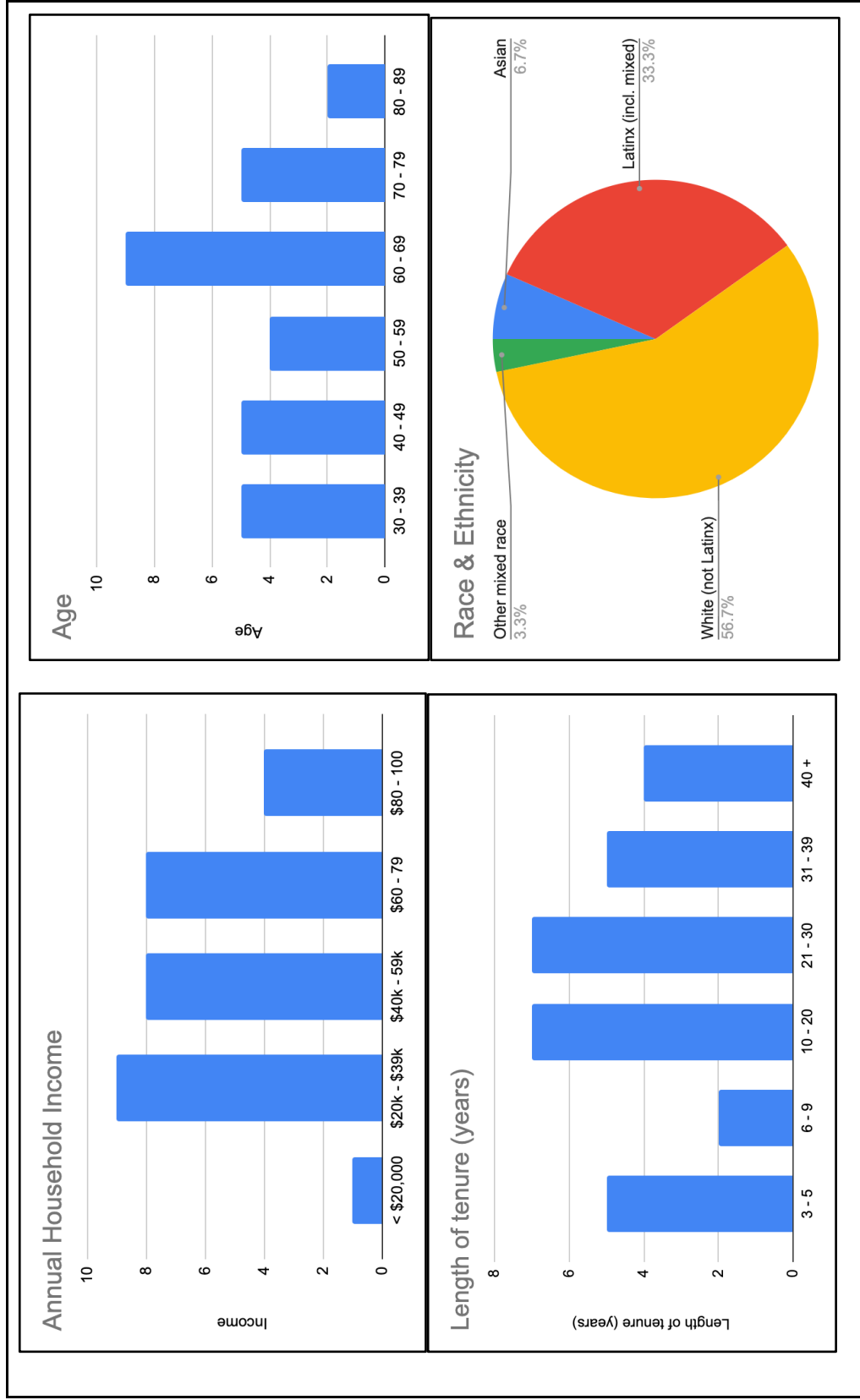
While I strove to represent the city's demographics as closely as possible in the composition of the participant pool, there were two areas where this was not achieved. 1. Over two-thirds of participants identify as women. This may be because women tend to participate in these activities more than men, or because the topic appeals to them more. I

tried to correct this in subsequent Facebook recruitment posts by mentioning that I was looking for more men, but was not able to close the gap. 2. While representation for white, Latinx and Asian populations was roughly commensurate with city composition (Latinx was actually higher), there were no Black participants in the study. There was one individual who set up an interview and rescheduled several times, before finally withdrawing due to family issues. There were also a few applicants who were well over the income threshold. I tried to identify community-based organizations that specifically serve the Black community in Santa Monica or West LA but was unable to locate any. This may be due to Santa Monica's especially small Black population, which comprises only of 4% of residents. See Appendix A for recruitment materials, as approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Participant demographics

Participants spanned many decades in age, from 30 to 88 years old. They are drawn from every neighborhood in Santa Monica (though the Pico Neighborhood and Wilmont are more heavily weighted), and have incomes ranging from under \$20,000 to \$100,000. The average household size is 1.7 people (compared to 1.9 citywide). Of the 30 participants, six grew up in Santa Monica and three others grew up in the immediate area. Seven individuals were born outside of the United States, and five are first generation Americans. More demographic information is presented in below in Figure 6:

Figure 6: Additional participant demographics



3.5 Conducting the interviews

The strength of semi-structured, in-depth interviewing – which is a participant-centered, constructionist interview approach - is it enables the interviewee to guide the conversation towards what holds the most importance for them (Shiner & Newburn, 1997). This means that if there are aspects that they feel are more salient about their current and past experiences than what the questions focus on, there is flexibility to redirect the discussion. In other words, it is “particularly well-suited to discover respondents’ own meanings and interpretations” (ibid, p 520, c.f. Rapley, 2001). In addition to shaping my evolving understanding of the subject by taking the conversation in different directions, the majority of participants were able to answer and thoughtfully reflect upon most of the questions I asked. When they wished to expand on a topic that was not directly relevant to the research (for example, limited-equity housing models) I allowed that to unfold until it felt like I could gently re-direct. There were a few participants who were not able to answer questions about some of the main topics (e.g., local government, tenant protections, sense of community), but they were outliers in the group and still had meaningful insights on other topics. Including these individuals in the sample despite the inability to answer some of these questions lends validity to the study, because they are very likely more representative of the average Santa Monican than some of the participants who were highly informed, or already had well-developed thinking on these topics.

The interviews were conducted on Zoom (either video or phone) and technological issues were occasionally present. Several participants had never used Zoom and doing so required some trial and error. Overall, participants came to the interview

process ready for meaningful discussion and reflection on the research topics, which had been broadly outlined in the recruitment literature. Some were more interested in certain aspects than others (e.g., landlord issues, political climate), but they were generally open and engaging, and the process was rewarding on my end, though also intellectually and energetically demanding. There was only one instance where a participant became emotional to the point of tears, and I held space and listened compassionately to what they shared about not feeling at home.

Many participants seemed motivated to participate in this research because it touched on aspects of their experiences that they had already reflected on to some extent, while others were interested for other reasons. The last interview question asked why one decided to participate in the study, and it captured a diversity of responses. A few people said they like to volunteer in the community and they view participation in my study as an opportunity to do so. One person responded to my letter because as a Jehovah's Witness she writes letters to strangers as well, and it seemed like the right thing to do. Another person was curious about the kinds of experiences others had had in rent-controlled housing. Several participants mentioned the importance of rent control in their lives and in Santa Monica more broadly, and that they wanted to help support the policy. Others simply felt that their lived experience might be valuable. The last participant said she felt it was important that someone (me) was speaking up for those who "feel like they're underdogs" and "struggle harder," which was humbling and touching.

The interview questions were originally structured in three sections, as listed below. I revised the order and wording of some of the questions several times early in the interview process for a smoother flow, as there were several transitions that felt awkward.

Notably, I moved the questions about the landlord and property manager into the portion where we discuss the apartment building, as the topic often came up organically in that section. It was important to me that the interview felt more like a conversation than a list of questions.

Relationship to place: This section draws on the place literature to explore the participant's relationship with their residence, building (when applicable), block, and neighborhood.

Relationship to place-based community: This section focuses on the social dimension of dwelling, by exploring the participant's relationship with their neighbors, involvement with community organizations, and perceptions of being included in the community as a renter. These first two sections connect to research question one.

Tenant protection policies, infrastructure and resources: This section begins with questions about knowledge of tenant protections, and where the information is received. It then asks participants if they experience a sense of stability due to their knowledge of tenant protections, or some other reason, if applicable. Finally, it synthesizes the three sections with discussion of potential connections between the experiences in the first two and the participant's knowledge of tenant protections. The depth and content of this discussion therefore depended heavily on how they had answered previous questions. The participant was not led to make connections if they hadn't already shared relevant information. This last section includes questions that address research questions one and two. Research question three was addressed by follow up questions throughout the interview that prompted the participant to reflect on the difference between their contemporary experience and pre-COVID. See Appendix A for

sample interview questions and the research questions they answer. Most interviews were in the one-to-two-hour range, with the two at around 30 minutes due to last minute scheduling issues, and several that were about two and a half hours.

Throughout this process I added to and reviewed my interview memos, which contain thick descriptions (Denzin, 1989) of observations conducting the interviews. These include difficulties answering the questions, desires to discuss other topics, confusion about questions or terms, body language, etc. This allowed me to iteratively revise the interview protocol, identify emerging themes, and continue to reflect on what I was trying to understand in asking these questions, while making sure that I was being responsive to what participants were actually sharing. These memos created throughout the process also monitored my own 'progressive subjectivity' (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, c.f. Shenton, 2003), as my constructions of the topic evolved throughout the process.

This was a somewhat unique research context because I already have such a deep knowledge of the study site, but seeing it through the eyes of strangers brought a new perspective to my understanding. The interview process was at times emotional for me, as I mentally revisited my home environment as a child and teenager, and in recent years when my mother briefly lived in the Wilmont neighborhood. As participants reminisced about places that were gone or had changed significantly, these were often places I had a connection to as well. I drew on this emotional response and deep place relationship and knowledge to build empathy and rapport with my participants, at times sharing my own memories and opinions when appropriate.

Following McKee et al. (2019) in their study on residential alienation in young renters in the UK, I also asked each participant to take photographs of their home in

advance of the interview. McKee, et al. (2019) found that the photos participants shared “provided useful prompts during the interviews...(and offered)...further visual insights for us into the young people’s lived experience” (p 6). While their research asked participants to take photos of their home generally, my prompt asked them to select their three favorite places in their home and photograph each one. It explained that places can be as small as a shelf or corner and as large as a room, and can be either interiors or exteriors. Participants emailed or texted me the photos, with a few individuals choosing to use Zoom’s screen sharing feature. The exercise was optional, and a little over half of participants shared photos. The intention was to use them as an elicitation device for discussion, in lieu of discussing the home’s interior in situ as was my preference. Had we been able to conduct interviews in the participant's home, which was prohibited per the university’s COVID regulations, I would have asked about aspects of caretaking and decor in evidence.

This exercise can be thought of as an abbreviated version of Resident-Employed Photography (REP), which is a qualitative pictorial method (Lewicka, 2010) that utilizes images created by study participants. REP is valued for its ability to produce thick data, which illuminates the complex, multifaceted nature of place meanings and attachment (Auken, Frisvoll & Stewart., 2010). Hawkins (1999) found that the process served as a form of ‘cueing’, by inviting individuals to reflect on their relationship with the environment, while Tonge, Moore, Ryan and Beckley (2013) theorized that the act of framing the photo changed and sharpened perception. The open-ended structure of the prompt allows the participant to guide meaning making, in contrast to the constraints of a survey or structured interview (Beckley, Stedman, Wallace & Ambard, 2007; Stedman,

Beckley, Wallace & Ambard, 2004; Harrild, 2014). In this scenario, the participant is positioned as the expert (Stedman, Amsden, Beckley & Tidball, 2014), which is in keeping with my philosophy of research. The intention of this exercise in my study was to provide insight about appropriation and caretaking practices which are a component of dwelling. While interesting, I did not find this activity to be as enlightening as McKee, et al. (2019) did. At the very least it served as an ice-breaker, which is helpful when conducting interviews on a remote video platform, where it is more challenging to establish rapport with participants than in-person.

3.6 Analysis

Interviews

Interviews were conducted on Zoom and transcribed using the built-in transcription feature. The transcripts were not of high quality, and the review process was tedious. I eventually transcribed the last third of the audio recordings with Otter.ti. However, this painstaking review process did create an opportunity to read closely through the transcripts while listening to the audio before commencing coding, which was helpful in assembling the code book. I began my first round of coding in ATLAS.ti, using a code book I had created based on a. themes I noticed while conducting the interviews and verifying the transcripts, b. the contextual material reviewed in Chapters Four and Five, and c. on the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. I used an ‘open coding’ or ‘initial coding’ approach (Saldana, 2009), which entails line-by-line coding that considers any and all elements of interest. Other coding strategies at this phase included descriptive coding, emotion coding, and values coding (ibid). In the spirit of open coding,

I added quite a few additional codes as the process unfolded. The initial code book had 120 codes, and there were about 200 by the end of the first round. I also took extensive notes throughout the first phase, as my thinking on different codes evolved.

After the first round of qualitative analysis I exported my codes in an Excel spreadsheet, and created columns where I identified the research question(s) and research question component(s) that each code pertained to. For example, *Apartment: likes neighbors* was noted as *RQ1, dwelling factor*. This helped eliminate codes that were not directly relevant to the research; make decisions on what could be merged, split or otherwise changed; and see what codes still needed to be added. This code revision process involved reviewing excerpts for specific codes and paying attention to nuances that only emerged when reading them in aggregate. For example, various types of opinions about the home environment were further differentiated depending on whether they were shared in response to asking about likes and dislikes, or in response to a neutral question asking the participant to simply describe the environment. I also drew on my notes from the first round of coding.

I then updated the codes where applicable in Atlas.ti. In some cases this simply meant changing the name or using the 'merge' feature, but for other codes it was a more painstaking process of reviewing the excerpts and reassigning some of them to new or different codes, as with the example above. After making these updates I went through all of the transcripts a second time, checking that the codes I had applied were appropriate, catching some mistaken code applications, and adding some that had been missed the first time.

Supporting data

The supporting data was collected and reviewed prior to coding the interviews. I searched the historic *Los Angeles Times* database from 1980 through 2008 using search terms ‘Santa Monica’ and ‘rent’, occasionally expanding on a specific search topic of interest. I chose to begin the search in 1980 rather than the beginning of the tenant movement in the mid-1970s, due the period’s extensive coverage in previous texts (Heskin, 1984; Capek & Gilderbloom, 1992). I then searched for the same terms in the *Santa Monica Daily Press* from the beginning of its online publication in 2009 through the present. I used this material to construct an historical narrative of the relationship between the City and landlords/industry groups, as articulated through both tenant protection policy-making and legal action initiated by various parties. This narrative provided macro level insight about landlord tactics and strategies, and illustrated the adversarial dynamic between the City and landlord interests over the past four decades. An abbreviated version is presented in Chapter Four for the purpose of situating the reader in policy changes that impact renter households, and in the city’s sociopolitical dynamic, both of which inform the person-place relationship (Manzo, 2003; Hulse et al., 2011).

I also reviewed two years of *Apartment Age* - a monthly trade magazine for owners of multifamily housing in the Los Angeles region - and drew from my detailed notes to identify overarching themes in the language and framing. Because I was not doing a formal discourse analysis and this was supporting rather than primary data, I elected to use this less formal method of analysis rather than coding. These data sources

were further augmented by a snapshot of market language and statistics on the website Loopnet during one week of the study period.

Empirical material on tenant protections gathered from City and SMRR platforms provided context on the contemporary policy landscape and what information is available to renters. Interviews with key informants provided other contextual insight. I interviewed two employees in the City Attorney's Public Rights Division, an attorney with Legal Aid, an attorney with the Eviction Defense Network, a Rent Control Board Commissioner, and one of the original SMRR activists. Whereas I use pseudonyms for the interview participants due to the vulnerability of their position as renters, these informants are comfortable using their actual names. I was not able to interview any SMRR hotline volunteers, and because the Los Angeles Tenants Union is not particularly active in Santa Monica, their case workers were not a good fit for this study.

Validation strategies

Drawing on my supporting data and analysis, I provide a thick description of the study context in Chapters Four and Five. Though findings from case studies are not transferable in the sense that those from experimental studies are, thick description enables the reader to make decisions about the transferability of different aspects of the case to other settings with shared characteristics (Creswell, 2007). This is especially important with this work, which aims to inform tenant activists and policymakers in other locations about the strengths and weaknesses of various tenant protections.

According to Creswell & Miller (2000), *triangulation* is “a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of

information to form themes or categories” (p 126). Denzin (1978, c.f. Creswell & Miller, 2000) identifies four different types of triangulation, and of these, my analysis included 1. triangulation across participant accounts (coding), and 2. triangulation between various data sources (synthesis). Synthesis of multiple data sources with interview data is intended to cultivate credibility (or internal validity) in my interpretation (Shenton, 2003).

The synthesis began in the coding stage, and continued through each subsequent phase, as I wove the contextual material into my interpretation of the interview data. After coding was complete, I composed a document with a detailed review of the themes from the interviews and considered how the supporting data and the themes I identified there related to what they revealed, within the context of the literature. What emerged from this triangulation was a new conceptual understanding, which is articulated in the concept map in Chapters One and Eight. This reflects Creswell & Miller’s (2000) description of triangulation as an endeavor that leads to the formation of themes or categories in the study. Though the interview data forms the core of my understanding of the residential experience, without the supporting data I would not have the holistic understanding of how the external factors like sociopolitical landscape and the multifamily housing market impacts it.

I also engaged in a version of *member checking* that entails verification of emerging theories and inferences as formed during the interviews. As Shenton (2003) described with this method, “where appropriate, participants may be asked if they can offer reasons for particular patterns observed by the researcher” (p 68). This is

commensurate with my research philosophy that participants are experts in their own lives, and that interviews are a collaborative meaning-making venture.

Finally, I offered participants the opportunity to review and comment on my findings, which is aligned with a more traditional type of member check (Shenton, 2003). Almost half of the participants responded to this email offer, some requesting just the discussion chapter, others requesting only their quotes, and the remainder who asked to review both documents. As of this time I have only received feedback from one participant, and it confirmed that I captured various aspects of the residential experience and importance of the policy accurately.

Chapter Four: The People's Republic of Santa Monica

“The rent control initiative has developed a new spirit of unity and strength in this silent majority...a permanent change in the political structure of the city is presently taking place, and rent control is the catalyst, the vehicle for such change. The tenants are preparing to take their rightful majority place in guiding the city into the future.”

-Syd Rose, tenant activist, 1978

The City of Santa Monica exists in a unique housing policy context and continues to be known nationally as an exemplar of strong rent control and other pro-tenant policies, which makes it an ideal site for a case study that explores the lived experience under the policy. Santa Monica activists made national headlines in the late 1970s with what was regarded at the time as a radical political and ideological coup, upending the previous regime's 'growth machine' ideology and supplanting it with a vision of a vibrant community, underpinned by a partial decommodification of privately owned rental housing (Capek & Gilderbloom, 1992). This remains deeply embedded in the city's identity and political culture, even in the face of dramatic socioeconomic shifts, recent political realignment and the gradual erosion of housing affordability.

For these reasons, an in-depth overview of the case study site is necessary a. to understand the nuances of contextual elements that may have bearing on renters' sense of at-homeness and other aspects of the person-place relationship (as articulated in the concept map), and b. as thick description (Creswell, 2000), which can enable the reader to generalize certain findings to other contexts. This attention to sociopolitical and policy context also responds to Manzo's (2003) call for research that looks at all scales of the home environment - including the political and economic - in seeking to understand the

person-place relationship. It is also inspired by the different contextual lenses in Hulse et al.'s (2011) secure occupancy framework.

This chapter looks at the facets that comprise Group One (security, insecurity and the residential experience) of the factors in the conceptual framework. These aspects inform ontological security and residential alienation, and by extension dwelling. The chapter begins with a brief overview of Santa Monica history, demographics and rental housing stock. Section two outlines the basic components of tenant protection policy in the city, including what information and resources are available to tenants, which maps onto facet three (sociolegal tenant protection landscape) of Group One. The next section offers an abbreviated version of my historical review of the evolution of relevant policy, which corresponds to both facet three and facet one (sociopolitical ideology about renting). Section three contains a brief summary of the contemporary political landscape, which adds additional context for facet one as well as for facet three of Group Two.

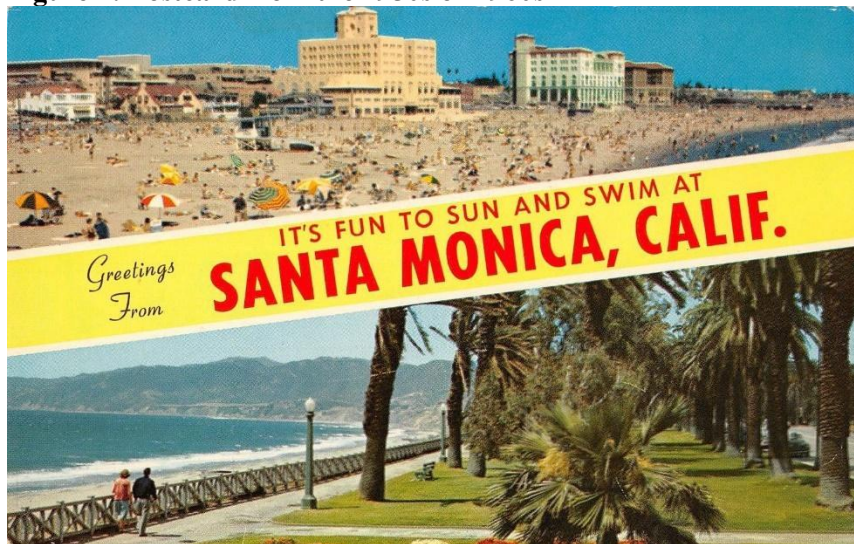
In the last section of this chapter I identify several themes that emerged from the review of this supporting data, and how I theorize these macro level factors might be experienced on the individual level by interview participants. My analysis of the interviews confirmed most of these hypotheses, and subsequent triangulation of themes from both datasets led to the creation of the conceptual framework articulated in the concept map.

4.1 Santa Monica, California

The beachside City of Santa Monica occupies the Tongva land of Kecheek and is surrounded by the City of Los Angeles on three sides and the Pacific Ocean on the fourth

(See Figure 8). It is one of 88 municipalities within Los Angeles County, is 8.3 square miles, and is home to about 93,000 of the county's 10 million residents (US Census Bureau, 2020). Much of its current footprint was part of the Spanish land grant ranches Rancho Boca de Santa Monica and Rancho San Vicente y Santa Monica and was later platted as a town in 1875. It was incorporated in 1886 and adopted a City Charter in 1945 (City of Santa Monica, n.d.). For the first half of the twentieth century it was primarily known as a resort town, until it became an important aerospace production center during World War II. Douglas Aircraft employed about 44,000 workers at the height of the war, which transformed the city as thousands of new homes were needed to accommodate the population increase (Santa Monica Municipal Airport, n.d.). It continues to be a popular vacation destination for local, national and international tourists (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Postcard from the 1950s or 1960s



Today the city has a relatively high percentage of renters at 71% of the population. Comparatively, Los Angeles County's percentage is 54.2%, while the City of Los Angeles is 43.2%. Santa Monica also has higher education levels, median income, rents, density, and racial and ethnic homogeneity than the county average, with 64.6% of

residents identifying as white only (not Latino) compared to 26% of county residents. Significantly, only 15.4% of Santa Monica's residents identify as Latino as compared to 48.6% county-wide. The average household size is 1.99 people and the median rent is \$1,802 (US Census Bureau, 2019), making it the most expensive rental market in the Los Angeles Metro Area (Chen, 2021). Santa Monica has an 'at large' City Council system, which means that its seven councilmembers are selected by the entire electorate, rather than by district as in neighboring Los Angeles. Every two years the City Council selects one of its members to serve as Mayor and another to serve as Mayor Pro Tempore (City of Santa Monica, n.d.). Councilmember terms are four years, and council members often hold full time jobs in addition to their position. The City Manager's Office leads the various City departments and staff in implementing the City Council's vision (City of Santa Monica, n.d.).

Figure 8: Map of the Los Angeles area



The majority of the city’s renters live in one of its 27,429 rent stabilized dwellings. Of those households, 24.7% have lived in their homes since before 1999. More than half of all rent-controlled apartments have been re-rented since 2011, with almost 40% changing tenancies between 2016 and 2020. 81% of tenants who moved into

a rent-controlled apartment in 2015 have since moved out (Santa Monica Rent Control Board, 2020). According to the Rent Control Board’s annual report,

“With starting rents at rates that would not be considered ‘affordable’ for many tenants, and without deep roots in the community, recent tenants appear more mobile. Tenants who have been renting in Santa Monica for a longer time, likely feel more connected to the community and realize the financial benefits of remaining in place” (ibid, 2020, p 22).

Over the years, housing in Santa Monica has become increasingly inaccessible to low-income households. Prior to vacancy decontrol at the beginning of 1999, 84% of rent-controlled homes were affordable to households in the low-, very low- and extremely low-income categories, whereas in 2020 only 4.2% are considered affordable to those households. Figure 3 illustrates the disparity between the average long-term tenancy⁶ and market rate tenancy. The high level of turn-over may produce social fissures and housing insecurity at the building and neighborhood levels, while the substantial rent gaps between long-term and market rate residences present strong incentives for landlords to increase said turn-over. Policy loopholes that facilitate this are discussed below.

Table 3: The ‘rent gap’ between rents paid by long-term tenants and market rates

Fig 14 | Median MARs by Unit Size & City Area: Long-Term Units vs. Market-Rate Units*

Area	0-Bedroom Units			1-Bedroom Units			2-Bedroom Units			3-Bedroom Units		
	long-term	market-rate	diff.	long-term	market-rate	diff.	long-term	market-rate	diff.	long-term	market-rate	diff.
A	\$702	\$1,677	\$975	\$929	\$2,364	\$1,435	\$1,155	\$3,034	\$1,879	\$1,350	\$3,651	\$2,301
B	\$603	\$1,425	\$822	\$826	\$1,922	\$1,096	\$982	\$2,572	\$1,590	\$1,350	\$2,874	\$1,524
C	\$811	\$2,413	\$1,602	\$842	\$2,784	\$1,942	\$982	\$2,958	\$1,976	*	*	*
D	\$549	\$1,500	\$951	\$770	\$1,922	\$1,152	\$862	\$2,275	\$1,413	\$1,062	\$3,113	\$2,051
E	\$704	\$1,635	\$931	\$839	\$1,979	\$1,140	\$1,092	\$2,627	\$1,535	\$1,373	\$3,449	\$2,076
F	\$827	\$1,707	\$880	\$1,014	\$2,432	\$1,418	\$1,330	\$3,134	\$1,804	\$1,537	\$4,197	\$2,660
G	\$757	\$1,758	\$1,001	\$888	\$2,215	\$1,327	\$1,202	\$2,938	\$1,736	\$1,563	\$3,918	\$2,355
CITY WIDE	\$745	\$1,707	\$962	\$888	\$2,166	\$1,278	\$1,106	\$2,795	\$1,689	\$1,421	\$3,595	\$2,174

* Aside from 1221 Ocean Ave, there are only five 3-bedroom units in Area C, so the median is not reported here.

(City of Santa Monica, 2020)

⁶ Long-term tenancies are homes that have been occupied by the same household prior to January 1, 1999 and have thus never been subject to vacancy decontrol.

4.2 Tenant Protections and Resources

Basic features of the rent control law

Santa Monica's rent control law is an amendment to the City Charter, which can only be modified by city voters. The major provisions of the law are that it:

1. Controls the amount that may continue to be charged for a rental unit and provides remedies for the collection of excess rent.
2. Determines the amenities and services that are included as part of the rent and provides remedies for removal or reduction of those amenities or services.
3. Provides for only "just cause" evictions.
4. Limits removal of controlled units from the rental market.

The law applies to most multifamily residential buildings built before April 10, 1979, and in certain circumstances, some buildings constructed after. It also applies to certain single-family homes and condominiums.⁷ Duplexes and triplexes are under the rent control by default but are eligible for removal if the owner moves into one of the residences.

Annual rent increases are limited to 75% of the increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the Los Angeles, Riverside and Orange County region, and the Rent Control Board may also set a dollar-amount limit which is calculated using a set formula. In 2021 the increase was 1.7% with a limit of \$39 a month.⁸ There is also a petition process to increase the rent on the entire property in the event of unusually high operating expenses, or for an individual residence in the event that the owner cannot make a 'fair

⁷ The Tenant Protection Act of 2019 at the state level established much higher rent increase caps (5% plus CPI) on buildings that are not covered by local rent control laws and were constructed at least 15 years prior to the current date.

⁸ Resolution 21-002

return', as guaranteed by the state and federal Constitutions. Likewise, the tenant may petition for a rent reduction if the landlord has been charging rent in excess of the Maximum Allowable Rent, for deferred maintenance or reduced amenities. Per state law there is no limit to how much a rent may be increased between tenancies.

Renters are also protected by 'just cause' eviction policy, which permits eviction for the following reasons: a. Occupation of the landlord or an immediate family member, b. Removal of the property from the rental market, c. Non-payment of rent, and d. Violation of a "material and substantial" obligation of the tenancy that has not been previously waived through the landlord's past behavior or statements. Owners are also allowed to offer a tenant money to move out, which is commonly known as "cash-for-keys," provided they furnish the tenant with certain information about their rights.

Changes to the Regulations, which dictate implementation and enforcement of rent control, are made by the Rent Control Board (RCB). They also hold hearings about rent decreases or increases, and occasionally file suit against landlords. This elected body is composed of five Commissioners and meets one or more times per month. Commissioners serve four-year terms and are compensated \$75 per meeting (Santa Monica Rent Control Board, 2020). The Rent Control Agency (RCA) is the entity that supports implementation, outreach and enforcement. It has a staff of twenty-five, and its primary source of revenue is the annual per-residence registration fee of \$198, the cost of which is shared between landlord and tenant. The RCA maintains a database of all rent-controlled residences in Santa Monica and proactively pursues delinquent registration fees. It also runs the Rent Control Office (RCO) which handles questions and other business from both landlords and tenants.

The Public Rights Division (PRD), which is situated within the City Attorney's Office, is another key entity that supports renters in the city. The PRD's mission is to "promote fairness in Santa Monica through awareness and enforcement of the law." According to Chief Deputy City Attorney Eda Suh, the PRD's housing scope encompasses helping landlords and tenants understand their rights and responsibilities; enforcing the law through court actions; and taking questions and complaints from tenants about policies like the eviction moratorium, tenant harassment, and Fair Housing law, among others. The division occasionally initiates legal action against a landlord on behalf of the City of Santa Monica. Code enforcement officers are trained on the tenant harassment ordinance and have the ability to issue citations, which in some cases eventually become part of a PRD harassment lawsuit. In the event habitability issues require the tenant to temporarily or permanently vacate, landlords are responsible for paying relocation fees and/or per diems, depending on the length of displacement (Eda Suh, personal interview, 2021).

Information & resources

Both renters and property owners/managers have a number of city-authored resources available for their consultation. In addition to an array of topics, news and forms, the city's [Rent Control](#) website includes a public database of the MAR for all residences that fall under the city's rent control law. It also links to a [Public Access Portal](#) where users can search by address and access relevant documents. The information on the Rent Control website, which had 94,009 views in 2020 (Santa Monica Rent Control Board, 2020) is outlined in Appendix B, as is the content under the *Housing* tab on the

PRD site.

As of spring 2021, Santa Monicans making under 80% of the County's Area Median Income and facing eviction are eligible for free legal services as part of the City's pilot Right to Counsel Program. The program is a collaboration between the City Attorney's Office, the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (LAFLA) and Stay Housed L.A. County (City of Santa Monica, 2021).

The RCA publishes a newsletter - *The Rent Control News* - twice a year in the spring and fall and is both posted on the website and mailed to owners and tenants of rent-controlled housing. For tenants, the fall edition includes each household's MAR for the year. The newsletters feature a mix of write-ups on new policies and existing policies; updates on personnel changes in the RCB and other relevant entities; new state laws; notices about the RCA's educational seminars and highlights from the RCB's Annual Report. A review of the newsletters from Fall 2018 through Spring 2021 is presented in Appendix B.

The RCA also conducts proactive outreach to new owners who have not yet registered their properties, sending a form letter with the basic requirements to register new tenancies, pay fees and notify tenants about their rights. If they have not, they are considered in noncompliance with the law and are prohibited from increasing the tenant's rent until they do. The RCA also offers a number of free seminars for landlords and tenants. Video recordings of all seminars from 2019 until the present are available on the website. Seminar topics and titles include *Tenants' Introduction to Rent Control*, *Owning Rental-Controlled Property in Santa Monica*, *Maintenance of Residential Rental Properties*, *Landlord-Tenant Forum*, and *2021 General Adjustment Notice Tutorial*. A

summary of both the landlord and tenant seminars in spring 2021 is included in Appendix B.

Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights (SMRR) produces their own tenant education materials and hosts seminars for tenants. They also operate a volunteer-run renters' rights hotline that is open to all tenants, regardless of membership status. Hotline callers reach a voicemail where they can leave their information and receive a call from a volunteer within 24 hours. SMRR's website also includes a list of resources for tenants, including city entities like the City Attorney and Rent Control Board, and nonprofits like Legal Aid.

In conclusion, residents of Santa Monica's rent-controlled housing have a wealth of resources from which to draw for information and support. Prior to the pandemic the RCA offered walk-in appointments with their staff at their City Hall office, in addition to telephone and email support. At the same time, the volume of information about tenant protections - both through the RCA and the PRD - is substantial and very detailed. This may result in scenarios where a tenant in crisis feels overwhelmed and unable to navigate through the various channels of information. The likelihood of self-advocacy is also likely to be mitigated by aspects like the individual's perception of self-efficacy, level of precarity (rent gap, income level), age, immigration status, the presence of other stressors, and the relationship with the landlord/manager.

4.3 The evolution of Santa Monica's tenant protections

The tenant protection policy landscape in Santa Monica (as elsewhere) has been characterized by a dialectic between the City and SMRR on one side, and landlord

industry groups like AAGLA and AAA on the other. As the City and SMRR-backed elected officials enact new policy in response to ever evolving changing landlord tactics, landlord groups respond with legal action. The residential rental industry continues to fight vehemently against policies like right to counsel, rental registries, harassment ordinances, and other policies. In this sense any notions that rent control and other tenant protections might eventually be accepted by trade organizations as the industry norm are laid to rest by a review of the past four decades of rhetoric and action. This section begins with an overview of the main actors in the housing policy landscape in Santa Monica, which is followed by an historical narrative of rental housing policy in Santa Monica. It highlights major tenant protection policies through the present day, many of which are referenced in the interviews. It also depicts a longterm struggle between the pro-tenant city government and landlord/market interests. These sociolegal and sociopolitical factors directly impact the residential experience for renters through both perception and material outcomes. Key legal cases are summarized in Appendix D.

Main actors

Santa Monicans for Renters Rights (SMRR)

Over 40 years after its formation SMRR remains a powerful (though contested) player in local politics. Despite the rapid expansion of the Los Angeles Tenants Union (LATU), SMRR remains the primary voice for tenant interests in Santa Monica. Conversations with several members of LATU's Westside local revealed that Santa Monica is not a frequent area of activity for the group, which potentially suggests that

SMRR and the City remain the default resource for tenant issues. SMRR is a voluntary membership organization and does not have paid staff. According to their official platform, “All residents are entitled to stability, safety, privacy, dignity and peace in their homes. A primary goal of Santa Monicans for Renters’ Rights is to support, defend and enhance rent control and tenant protections locally, regionally and statewide”.⁹ In addition to this fundamental mission, the platform also includes a number of other progressive initiatives.

The organization’s work is guided by the twelve-member steering committee, which is led by two co-chairs. Currently Denny Zane - one of SMRR’s founders and former mayor of Santa Monica - is serving as one Co-Chair. Mike Soloff, who is married to Mayor Sue Himmelrich, is the other Co-Chair. The majority of elected officials in Santa Monica since SMRR’s inception have been endorsed by the organization, including all Rent Control Board commissioners. Eleven of the past twelve mayors are SMRR members, and candidates endorsed by SMRR have held a majority on City Council most years since their initial electoral victory in 1981. Each year SMRR holds its Annual Membership Convention, where candidates seeking endorsement make speeches and members vote on who will receive the SMRR endorsement. These include not only City Council candidates, but also School and College Board and state representatives. The SMRR Steering Committee is also elected at the annual meeting. Annual member dues are \$35, and members receive one or two newsletters a year. The past two years of newsletters are reviewed in Appendix B.

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all SMRR info is from SMRR.org.

Santa Monica Forward (SMF)

This relatively new advocacy group embraces many of the same values and objectives as SMRR, and was founded in 2015 by former mayor, councilmember and SMRR steering committee member Judy Abdo (Bauer, 2015). Their mission statement describes the organization as “working for a diverse, progressive, sustainable and equitable Santa Monica”.¹⁰ Critics of the group frame their agenda as aligned with the YIMBY (Yes In My Backyard) movement (which the group does not dispute) and thus beholden to developer interests (which it does dispute). This tension between the need for more housing, the desire to preserve the aesthetic character of the city, and the perception that certain entities are covertly allied with developers is a common thread in Santa Monica’s contemporary civic discourse. They support continuing rent control.

Santa Monicans for Change (SMC)

Founded in 2020 to support a slate of City Council candidates, this political action committee describes its mission as “working to save the soul of Santa Monica.” The website lists its core concerns as the May 31st looting and police response, an increase in crime, luxury buildings replacing affordable apartments, homelessness, overdevelopment, and budget cuts to essential services.¹¹ They ostensibly support continuing rent control, but it is not a core concern of their platform.¹²

ACTION Apartment Association (AAA) and Rosario Perry

¹⁰ SantaMonicaForward.org

¹¹ SantaMonicansForChange.com

¹² It is politically risky in Santa Monica to openly support repealing rent control, so it is unlikely that any candidate would take that stance.

This landlord trade group was founded in 1979 in the wake of the tenant movement’s dramatic victory enacting rent control and describes the policy as “radical” on their website. They offer practical services for their members like access to standard forms, presentations on landlord-tenants law at their monthly meetings, and other know-your-rights resources. They also have an advocacy PAC. The organization appears to have right wing political leanings, with a category for “blue state conservative websites” on their website’s *Links* page.¹³ Over the past four decades AAA has initiated numerous lawsuits against the city.

Apartment Association of Greater Los Angeles (AAGLA)

AAGLA was founded in 1917 and is a membership trade organization that serves landlords and property managers throughout Southern California. Their mission is to “provide the tools and resources needed to improve real estate management and operations to ultimately help our members provide safe housing and to ensure fair returns on investments”.¹⁴ They offer their members numerous monthly education seminars on practical aspects of property ownership and management, as well as broader topics like *What Are Tenant Advocate Groups Teaching Tenants?*, which promises to “help you formulate and deploy a winning strategy to fight back against tenant attacks and win in court.” The organization has over 10,000 members who own or manage roughly 175,000 rental homes in Ventura, Los Angeles, and San Bernardino counties. Membership includes free attendance at these events, access to a legal forms library, operational advice, a subscription to the monthly magazine *Apartment Age*, and discounts on various

¹³ ActionTakesAction.com

¹⁴ All information from AAGLA.org

services from a number of vendors. AAGLA Membership also includes free membership to the California Rental Housing Association and the National Apartment Association.

The organization also engages in advocacy and lobbying efforts, with the AAGLA Legal Fund, the AAGLA PAC, and the AAGLA Issues PAC. They have an advocacy and lobbyist team in Los Angeles that work in the three counties they serve, three full time lobbyists in Sacramento, and they help fund lobbyists in Washington D.C. In addition to submitting comments and testimony on policy proposals and meeting with elected leaders, the group has been the plaintiff in numerous lawsuits against various municipalities, including Santa Monica.

The Early Days

Several events set the stage for California's tenant movement of the 1970s. A population increase early in the decade strained the existing housing stock and outpaced the construction of new rental housing, but rent increases remained moderate for several years. In the mid-1970s the construction of new multifamily housing declined significantly, and rents began to increase substantially. Inflation was also significant, with a CPI increase of 7.8% in 1976 in the Los Angeles area. The California real estate industry was mobilized by the threat of tenant organizing throughout the state, and their lobbyists introduced a legislative bill to preempt local rent control legislation at the state level. Though it passed in the Senate, the State Department of Housing and Community Development convinced Governor Jerry Brown to veto it. This galvanized tenant advocates statewide, and resulted in the formation of the California Housing Action and

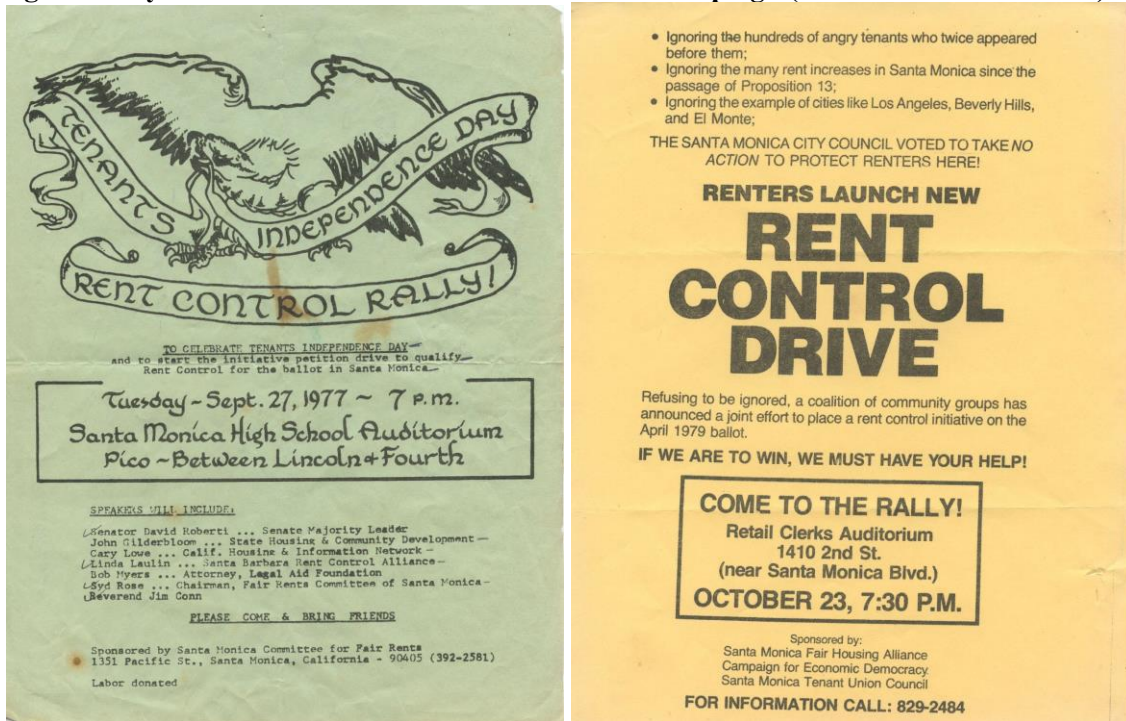
Information Network (CHAIN), whose strategy was to build tenant power through local organizing (Heskin, 1983).

In Santa Monica median rents rose 125% between 1970 and 1980 (Capek & Gilderbloom, 1992). One factor was a spike in real estate speculation that led to a tenfold increase in the number of rental properties sold between 1972 and 1977 (Heskin, 1983). Condominium conversions were also a major issue for Santa Monica renters, with over 500 rental homes converted from apartments to condominiums in 1978 and 1979 (Capek & Gilderbloom, (1992). In response, a group of seniors and young activists called the Santa Monica Fair Housing Alliance (SMFHA) formed and succeeded in placing a rent control charter amendment on the 1978 ballot. Outspent 25 to one by landlord interests the initiative failed to pass, with 54% of the electorate voting against it ([Tarbet, 2019](#)).

The orientation of Santa Monica's political establishment at the time was traditional and conservative, with councilmember Seymour Cohen remarking, "Some people wisely invested in property and I don't condemn them for their actions. Some of you are too lazy to go out and do the same thing" (Capek & Gilderbloom, 1992, p 67). During this same period Mayor Swink opined that the problem in the city was not high rents, but rather too many renters and not enough homeowners (Heskin, 1983). According to Rev. Jim Conn - who led the progressive Church in Ocean Park during the time and was deeply involved in the movement - one councilmember informed him that poor people were just going to have to learn to accept that they would not be able to live in the city anymore. In response, Conn made it his mission to advocate for policy and programming that would enable low-income households to remain in Santa Monica (Jim Conn, personal interview, 2021).

Meanwhile, homeowners statewide had rallied around the unprecedented spikes in property taxes, resulting in the passage of Proposition 13, which was (and remains) a major tax benefit for homeowners (Heskin, 1983). Landlords engaged in an intensive campaign to garner tenant support for Proposition 13, promising more stable rents if the proposition passed. This acted to defuse the urgency of the demand for rent control, but when rent increases continued after the bill's passage tenant organizing and agitation escalated in Santa Monica and beyond. SMRR was formed as a coalition of SMFHA, Tom Hayden's national organization, the Campaign for Economic Democracy (CED), the Santa Monica Democratic Club, and the Committee for Fair Rents (Tarbet, 2019) (See Figure 9 for examples of organizing material from this time). Drawing on CED's substantial organizational resources and knowledge, as well as a coterie of committed volunteers, SMRR ran another campaign to pass a rent control ballot measure the following year (Hill-Holtzman, 1994). Despite intensive counter-campaigning by the opposition, the charter amendment ballot measure passed with 54.3% in favor. SMRR candidates Ruth Yannatta Goldway and William Jennings were also elected to the City Council (Shearer, 1982) and two months later all five SMRR candidates were elected to the newly-formed Rent Control Board (Heskin, 1983).

Figure 9: Flyers from the Santa Monica rent control campaign (1977 and unknown date)



SMRR gradually increased its political power with a series of electoral victories, achieving a majority on Council in 1981 with the election of Jim Conn, Ken Edwards, Denny Zane and Dolores Press (Shearer, 1982). While the tenant movement victory in Santa Monica was arguably the most dramatic in the region because rent control was won at the ballot box rather than with a council vote, by the end of 1979 Los Angeles County, El Monte, the City of Los Angeles, and Beverly Hills also had rent control policies in place (Heskin, 1983). In the midst of these historic victories, landlord and real estate opposition was relentless. Santa Monica was dubbed “The People’s Republic of Santa Monica” by the landlord cohort, who portrayed the sea change as dangerously radical and even communistic. The involvement of Tom Hayden and his wife Jane Fonda contributed to this framing (Shearer, 1982), but ultimately it was the challenge to the primacy of private property and the *right* to profit that was the most objectionable.

Though SMRR was founded with the objective of enacting a rent control law in Santa Monica, it expanded its agenda early on to include a breadth of priorities. Capek & Gilderbloom (1992) describe the ideological expansion of SMRR's agenda as "a vision of community...that was much broader than the single focus on rent control" (p 94). According to former SMRR co-chair Nancy Greenstein, the organization's vision for Santa Monica represented a fundamental ideological departure from the former regime. Prior to the city's progressive awakening it was largely run by the Chamber of Commerce and established families concerned with maintaining the status quo of business interests' hegemony and 'growth machine' ethos. In contrast, SMRR focused on environmental issues, increased social services, women's rights, workers' rights, preserving diversity, and economic vitality, among other priorities. After rent control passed, "There was a sense of ownership, even though you didn't own it. There was a sense of, this is my community, this is where I live. We had a voice" (Greenstein, personal interview, 2018). As Conn explained, "We had a whole vision for what we wanted the city to be like. We had a whole vision of the elements that needed to be in place for this to be a livable place for everybody" (Conn, 2021).

Robert M. Myers authored the Rent Control Charter Amendment a mere three years after graduating from Loyola Law School, while working as a staff attorney with the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles (Vanaman German LLP). According to the Amendment's Statement of Purpose, Article XVIII aims to address how:

"A growing shortage of housing units resulting in a low vacancy rate and rapidly rising rents exploiting this shortage constitute a serious housing problem affecting the lives of a substantial portion of those Santa Monica residents who reside in residential housing. In addition, speculation in the purchase and sale of existing residential housing units results in further

rent increases. These conditions endanger the public health and welfare of Santa Monica tenants, especially the poor, minorities, students, young families, and senior citizens.”

Myers went on to serve as Santa Monica’s City Attorney from 1981 to 1992, when he was fired by Council for refusing to draft an ordinance that would restrict outdoor food distribution programs for the city’s houseless population. His objection was unsurprising, as Myers had helped set up such a program on the lawn of City Hall. He continued to work at the Saturday food distribution program after his dismissal from City Hall (*The New York Times*, 1992). Longtime tenant lawyer Elena Popp credits Myers with creating a culture of proactively enforcing consumer protections and laws that protect the oppressed within the City Attorney's office (Popp, 2021).

Ultimately, Heskin (1983) attributes SMRR’s victory to their successful ideological framing of what was at stake:

“Tenants repeatedly asserted their attachment to the community. They denied that tenants were second-class citizens and asserted the rights and status of full citizens. They referred to their apartments as homes, and indicated that they felt these homes were threatened. They emphasized their desire to stay in Santa Monica, where some had lived all their lives” (p 56).

This rhetoric was the foundation of Santa Monica tenants’ successful moral claims to their neighborhoods, communities, and city. It challenged homeowner ideology by asserting that the people who actually live and work in a community are its rightful owners, regardless of whose name is on the property deed. The tenant movement’s flyers often featured senior citizens who faced or had already experienced displacement. They evoked not only the cruelty of uprooting someone in their golden years, but also the irreplaceable loss of one’s *home* environment. As Capek & Gilderbloom (1992) write,

this “change in the identity of tenants is one of the most tangible results of the social movement in Santa Monica” (p 136). The differentiation between ‘home’ and housing as a commodity was at the crux of the paradigm shift that repositioned tenants as full members of society in Santa Monica and beyond. Accordingly, an examination of the extent to which residents of Santa Monica’s rent controlled housing feel ‘at home’ - over four decades after the initiation of this progressive vision - is at the heart of my research.

Housing Policy in Santa Monica: 1981 - 2021

Santa Monica’s local affordable housing development and preservation entity, the Community Corporation of Santa Monica (CCSM), was founded by tenant activist Allan Heskin in 1982 (Capek & Gilderbloom, 1992). The organization has built or restored over 90 properties throughout the city, containing nearly 1,700 affordable homes, with environmental sustainability as a guiding principle. The current Chair of the Board is Patricia Hoffman, who previously served as the SMRR Co-Chair for over ten years. CCSM is not officially affiliated with the city government, though they receive local affordable housing funds, in addition to funding from the City of Los Angeles, federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, and the state and county funds.¹⁵

In 1984 city voters enacted the Tenant Ownership Rights Charter Amendment (TORCA), which allowed rent-controlled apartments to be converted to condominiums in certain circumstances. Conversion was only allowed if all tenants consented. Each resident would have the opportunity to purchase their home for a below market price and any resident who chose not to buy was able to remain in their home under rent control.

¹⁵ <https://www.communitycorp.org/>

The amendment had a ‘sunset’ provision to expire in 1996 unless voters opted to extend it, which did not come to pass (Santa Monica Rent Control Board, 2015).

The Ellis Act - one of two statewide policies that have been most detrimental to the efficacy of local rent control - was passed by the State Legislature in 1985. The law “prohibits any public entity from requiring apartment owners to continue offering their dwellings for rent or lease” (Keyser Marston Associates, 2017, p 2). It was catalyzed by a lawsuit filed by 18-year-old Jerome Nash, a UCLA student who inherited a six-residence apartment building from his mother and was denied permission to demolish it. He won in Superior Court but the decision was reversed in the state Supreme Court, and the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case. The California Association of Realtors lobbied state Senator Jim Ellis (R-San Diego) to sponsor a bill that would guarantee landlords the right to evict their tenants and ‘exit the rental business’, which would preempt any local prohibitions on demolition such as those encountered by Nash (Ryon, 1986). In response, the City enacted the Condo Conversion Ordinance in 1988, which stipulates owners who use the Ellis Act may not *convert* the property into condominiums, though they may demolish the property and redevelop it as such (Keyser Marston Associates, 2017). In the years since the Ellis Act went into effect in 1986 a considerable number of rent-controlled homes have been withdrawn, with a net loss of 2,075 residences in 483 buildings. Condominium redevelopment accounts for 24.3% of withdrawals, followed by conversion to single-family homes (12.8%) and leaving the property unoccupied (15.5%) (City of Santa Monica, 2020).

In early 1990 the Rent Control Board’s annual report revealed that the rate of Ellis Act apartment withdrawals was escalating rapidly. Most of the apartments being removed

from the market had rents well below the average rent-controlled apartment. Moreover, many of the properties had been purchased in the past two years. This meant the law was being utilized by new owners who wanted to maximize profit, rather than by long-term landlords who wanted to exit the business as ostensibly intended. In response, the Rent Control Board called a special meeting to hear testimony from tenants who had been evicted under the law. Instead, the meeting was dominated by landlords, who were united in their claim that the only way to slow down the Ellis Act evictions would be to allow ‘vacancy decontrol’, or unlimited rent increases between tenancies.

In that year’s election cycle, the landlord lobby and SMRR both authored measures in response to this issue. According to city housing officials, about 1,000 of Santa Monica’s 30,000 rental homes had been either taken off the rental market or were scheduled to be removed over the previous four years (Moran, 1990a). The landlord-sponsored ballot measure Proposition U would have established vacancy decontrol between tenancies. The tenant-backed Proposition W proposed allowing landlords a one-time rent increase to a set level between tenancies, but they would remain well below market rates (Moran, 1990b).

Proposition U lost by a wide margin and Proposition W narrowly lost at the polls, by a margin of 266 votes (Los Angeles Times, 1990). The Rent Control Board subsequently implemented the Threshold Rent Program, which went into effect January 1, 1992. The program was specifically intended to help landlords that were already charging below market rent when rent control was initially implemented. It provided landlords with the opportunity to apply for a limited rent increase in the event of a change in tenancy. Landlords were required to submit an application to the Rent Control Board

and prove that the vacancy was voluntary and not the result of harassment. (Hill-Holtzman, 1992). In the program's first eighteen months it received 1,862 petitions for rent increase, with an average monthly adjustment of \$103 (Santa Monica Rent Control Board, 1994).

The landscape of rent control in California was transformed dramatically with the passage of Assembly Bill 1164 in the state legislature. More commonly known as Costa-Hawkins, the legislation was the culmination of over a decade of landlord lobbying, and disallowed vacancy control in California. This meant that cities like Santa Monica and West Hollywood were legally obligated to permit owners to increase rents without limit when a tenant moved out. State Senator Jim Acosta (D-Fresno) commented that the new rules would "create a positive business climate for the construction of rental housing throughout (the) state." Herb Balter of AAA stated, "We're ecstatic, after 16 years of being held hostage, we are finally free." Rent increases for new tenants were to be phased in over a period of three years at 15%, after which landlords would be free to charge new tenants market rent (Vanzi, 1995).

Meanwhile, tenant advocates were bracing themselves for the deleterious effects of vacancy decontrol. Mayor Denny Zane predicted that Santa Monica would become more upscale, while in West Hollywood, councilmember Paul Koretz worried that "affordable housing is out the window now and there's not a thing we can do about it." Both cities enacted anti-harassment ordinances in anticipation of landlords harassing tenants paying below market rent in order to collect higher rents from prospective new tenants (Moore, 1995). Vacancy decontrol had the anticipated effect. A 1997 *Los Angeles Times* article on changing landlord behavior reported tactics like attempting eviction for

an oil stain under a car; suddenly enforcing no-pet rules on pet owners; refusing to accept rent checks; delaying repairs; and making numerous requests to inspect the same apartment. According to Denise McGranahan of Legal Aid, “There have always been bad landlords, but now we’re seeing more frequent cases of harassment. Landlords are bolder because they think they can get away with it” (Glionna, 1997).

At the behest of Council, Proposition 1 was placed on the ballot in April 1999, and passed with 72% of the vote. It addressed new landlord tactics to evict tenants paying below market rent through petty lease violations, and stipulated that a landlord may not evict a tenant for violating a rule if they had not previously enforced it (Welch, 1999). In 2002 Measure FF passed, extending eviction protections in rent-controlled residences to spouses, children or domestic partners of tenants who die or become incapacitated (City of Santa Monica, 2015). In 2010 the RCB introduced a ballot measure to broaden the scope of tenant protections in Santa Monica, in response to a finding in the RCA’s annual report that 74% of evictions between 2005 and 2009 were for breach of contract or nuisance (SMDP, 2010a). Measure RR was approved by voters in November elections 65.36% to 43.64% and establishes that landlords must give tenants a ‘reasonable time’ to correct rental agreement violations (excluding non-payment of rent). It also stipulates landlords may not evict elderly, disabled or terminally ill tenants to move into the residence unless they themselves also meet one of the above criteria (SMDP, 2010b).

In 2015 Council decided to focus on initiatives that would maintain an inclusive and diverse community (Hall, 2016). In line with this mission, Council voted unanimously to disallow discrimination against Section 8 voucher holders, which was not yet protected under state law (Simpson, 2015). City Council also targeted AirBnB and

other short-term rental platforms with its Home-Sharing Ordinance. The rule prohibits renting an entire residence for less than 30 days and requires individuals who choose to take part in allowable home-sharing to obtain a business license and pay a 14% hotel tax. Significantly, the ordinance draws a conceptual distinction between ‘home-sharing’ and ‘vacation rentals’. As Mayor Kevin McKeown explained, “When a landlord or other property owner takes a unit off the housing market and uses it for vacation rental, there is no permanent resident on the site. We’ve lost that part of the fabric of our community.” He also cited resident concerns about noise and disruptions (Sanders, 2015).

Meanwhile, the median monthly rent for a rent-controlled studio apartment¹⁶ increased 16% between 2016 and 2017 and 7% for a one-bedroom. Addressing the rent increase data, RCB Commissioner Todd Flora commented, “This annual report scares the shit out of me, because the affordability crisis gets worse and worse and worse.” The Board voted unanimously to support AB 1506, which was introduced by Santa Monica Assemblyman Richard Bloom and two other members from the Bay Area, and sought to overturn Costa Hawkins (SMDP, 2017c). It was not successful and would not be the last attempt. The same year the City approved the Preserving Our Diversity (POD) pilot program, which provides financial assistance to very low-income long-term tenants (defined as those that began before January 1, 2000) aged 65 and older who live in rent-controlled apartments. The funds are generated from local sales taxes raised through Measure GSH in 2016 and the program is still in place (City of Santa Monica, 2021).

¹⁶ This includes apartments that have been occupied since before rental control was implemented in 1979, and apartments that were recently rented at market rates.

In 2018 the Rent Control Board established that landlords cannot exceed rents by engaging in Ratio Utility Billing Systems (RUBS), which divide a building's master meter bill evenly by the number of units. AAA had filed suit against the Board on the grounds that utilities are not rent and are therefore not subject to rent limits. The case was settled in Los Angeles Superior Court, which agreed with the Board that AAA was essentially making a policy argument rather than a legal one (Costello, 2018). Later that year City Council passed an ordinance that protects students and educators against no-fault evictions during the school year (Farrell, 2018).

California Proposition 10 appeared on the 2018 November ballot. The measure would have overturned Costa Hawkins, giving municipalities the power to end vacancy decontrol, and extend rent control to newer housing and to single family homes. City Council voted unanimously to endorse it. Council Member Kevin McKeown explained,

“Even with the strongest rent control law in the state, Santa Monica has seen housing affordability undermined by twenty years of sudden jumps to market-rate rents under Costa-Hawkins. Our vote to support Proposition 10 is a vote for working families, students, fixed-income seniors, and everyone else whom Costa-Hawkins has been pricing out of Santa Monica” (Watchel, 2018).

Real estate PAC mailers played up a purported loss in property values for homeowners, with one projection warning voters that property values could drop by an average of \$60,000. The landlord and real estate lobby raised a stunning \$71 million, almost three times the \$25 million raised in supporter contributions, and the measure was defeated with 59.43% against (Ballotpedia, 2018).

In 2019 City Council increased the amount landlords must compensate tenants for ‘no-fault’ evictions, such as Ellis Act evictions or owner move-in. The compensation for

a typical studio went from \$9,950 to \$15,020, while a one bedroom went from about \$15,300 to \$20,705 (Pauker, 2019a). Council also voted to give affordable housing waitlist priority to qualifying households displaced by owner move-in (Pauker, 2019b). The RCB urged Council to create a new law limiting cosmetic upgrades to situations in which the apartment is already vacant or the tenant agrees, in response to bad faith ‘renovictions’. They also asked Council to pass a law barring landlords from subdividing rent-controlled apartments, which had been a common practice for AirBnB and other vacation rental ventures (Pauker, 2019c).

Meanwhile, rents in Santa Monica continued to increase. The RCB’s annual report revealed that a household making the median income in the greater Los Angeles area cannot afford even a studio apartment in Santa Monica without being rent burdened. According to the RCB’s Executive Director Tracy Condon, “People know the value of staying in place. They can’t leave these affordable units and find something comparable, particularly in Santa Monica. There are fewer people in rent-controlled housing than there were 20 years ago, but they’re staying as long as they possibly can.” (Pauker, 2019b). In early 2020, Councilmembers responded to the growing issue of businesses leasing apartments for corporate housing by adopting an ordinance that requires leases to be for a minimum of one year, the tenant to be a person, and the home to be unfurnished. (Dixon, 2020).

Two years after Proposition 10 was defeated the Rental Affordability Act (Proposition 21) met with the same fate. Statewide 40.15% of voters supported the measure (Ballotpedia, 2020), compared to 57% of Santa Monica voters (Harter, 2020). The proposal would have enabled local governments to establish rent control on homes

that are 15 years old or older, including single-family homes and condominiums if the landlord owns more than two properties. Supporters of the ballot measure raised almost \$41 million in contributions; just less than half of the opposition's \$83.5 million, but almost double what was raised for the Proposition 10 campaign. The Issues PAC of AAGLA contributed \$112,790 (Ballotpedia, 2020).

In the same election, Rent Control Board Commissioners Anastasia Foster and Caroline Torosis were elected for a second term, easily defeating the non-SMRR endorsed candidate Robert Kronovet, who received only 14% of the vote. On the importance of rent control in Santa Monica Foster said,

‘If we didn’t have a hot market we wouldn’t need as stringent of protections. But money is unapologetic, capital seeks to increase itself, and what we are saying is that there are human lives and families at the other end of that capital. Owning a multifamily building is not like owning a strip mall, you don’t just have tenants who pay rent, these are human lives’ (Harter, 2020).

Foster identified three forces lowering the availability of rent controlled homes in Santa Monica: landlords pushing tenants out to raise prices; landlords pushing tenants out so they can sell the building with empty apartments; and landlords converting their properties to short-term vacation rentals. Foster and Torosis characterized the majority of landlords as good actors, but said there are some bad actors that require the Rent Control Board’s intervention (ibid).

During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic Santa Monica tenants were protected by California’s eviction moratorium, which was in place from March 2020 through September 30, 2021 and applied to cases where households could not pay rent due to a COVID-related income loss. They were required to submit a declaration of

financial impact each month, and pay 25% of rent due for the months of September 2020 through September 30, 2021 by September 30, 2021. There is also a state rental assistance program for both landlords and tenants. The City has implemented several additional policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. No-fault terminations for Ellis Act withdrawals were mostly prohibited, as well as for-cause terminations for unauthorized occupant or pets, or nuisance. Additionally, the penalty for harassment increased from \$10,000 to \$15,000 (Santa Monicans for Renters Rights seminar, 2021).

The PRD has received many complaints around landlords refusing to accept COVID-19 rental assistance, and they have been able to intervene using the City's source of income discrimination protection. At the same time, many of the same types of pre-pandemic complaints have continued (Suh, 2021). During the period between April 2020 and April 2021 the PRD received over 1,000 calls about harassment, and their website had 50,000 page views. Of the 150 tenant complaints filed over the time period, 84 have included harassment, and 63 were related to the eviction moratorium. They also received 28 source of income discrimination complaints (Eda Suh, SMRR webinar, 2021). Lastly, the City Attorney's Office launched its pilot Right to Counsel program in 2021 (Farrell, 2021a).

In conclusion, the City's proactive approach to protecting Santa Monicans who rent their homes is exceptional among American municipalities. This may result in housing stability (both de facto and perceptual) and a perception of stakeholder status among rental households at a much greater level than other locales. At the same time, tenant awareness of the landlord lobby's constant attack - both legal and tactical - on

these protections as reported in local media may create the opposite effect.

4.4 Contemporary political landscape

A thorough examination of the intricacies of Santa Monica's contemporary political landscape - in which almost every politician and group arrays somewhere on the 'progressive' spectrum - is outside the scope of this research project. However, a brief recap of recent events is helpful to understand macro-level elements that may inform how much participants feel 'at home' on the city, community and neighborhood scales. This comprises the sociopolitical dimension of Group One of factors in the conceptual framework.

Prior to the advent of the pandemic, a survey measuring resident satisfaction found that Santa Monicans were overwhelmingly satisfied with the quality of services like libraries, trash and recycling collection, parks and beaches, firefighting and tree trimming. Community engagement was also high, with 62% of respondents volunteering for a community or nonprofit organization at least once a month. Overall, 87% of respondents rated Santa Monica as either an 'excellent' or 'pretty good' place to live. However, there were several areas where respondents expressed dissatisfaction, including addressing the homelessness crisis (59%), and traffic services (42%). Over half of respondents perceived an increase in crime from the previous year, with 30% indicating crime had increased "a lot" and 25% "a little" (Goodwin Simon Strategic Research/City of Santa Monica, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted some of the city's strongest assets, while magnifying some of the challenges identified in the 2018 survey. The loss of dining,

entertainment and tourism revenue resulted in a projected \$75 million budget shortfall for the 2019/2020 fiscal year, with an additional projected deficit of \$154 million for the following year. Faced with public criticism over having to make personnel and program cuts, City Manager Rick Cole resigned in April 2020 (Chang, 2020).

On May 31st, 2020, a large march to protest the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police was held in downtown Santa Monica. While the peaceful march unfolded on Ocean Avenue with a sizable police presence, a few blocks away a large crew of organized looters broke into over 150 businesses in the downtown area, driving up in cars to load merchandise and returning with empty cars to reload them. The Santa Monica Police Department (SMDP) did virtually nothing to intervene in the looting, even as they deployed tear gas and pepper balls against peaceful protesters blocks away and arrested over 400 people. A City-commissioned report described the SMPD response as a “wholesale failure” (Dixson, 2021). According to former Councilmember Ted Winterer, the City’s administrative structure does not empower Council to direct the Chief of Police, which meant that there was little they could do to intervene as events unfolded. Winterer and the rest of Council had been assured by Police Chief Cynthia Renaud that SMPD was prepared, but she had evidently miscalculated staffing needs and strategy, and was also out of town for her daughter’s graduation on the day in question (ibid).

Mayor Kevin McKeown made a statement early the next day that “our public safety officers showed professional restraint and resolve under the most difficult circumstances,” and acting City Manager Lane Dilg described Chief Renaud’s performance as a “strong A...for keeping our community safe” (Gumbel, 2020). Renaud

explained, “My first responsibility is to protect the lives of people in our community, and on Sunday, my priority was the preservation of life and protection of the city” (Winton, 2020). However a petition calling for Renaud’s removal garnered over 66,000 signatures. Faced with growing public outcry, Renaud retired in October 2020 and was temporarily replaced by her predecessor, Jacqueline Seabrooks (ibid). In the wake of the events of May 31st the City formed a Public Safety Reform & Oversight Commission to implement the recommendations of the report (Dixson, 2021).

These events set the stage for the November election, where four Council seats were in play. At face value the three groups (SMRR, SMC, SMF) have a number of overlapping priorities. For example, they all mention protecting vulnerable renters and creating more affordable housing. However, they diverge substantively on how to achieve these ends. SMC prioritizes slow growth and low-density; SMF espouses the YIMBY platform; and SMRR essentially occupies a space between the two, embracing slow growth with an emphasis on supporting renters by maintaining tenant protections and creating affordable housing. SMRR endorsed four of the five incumbent candidates in the 2020 Council election while SMF backed all five (Brophy, 2020). Though there are many issues on which the groups agree, the main tension revolves around SMF’s strong support for increasing density through the City’s state-mandated Housing Element, with SMRR arguing that that target number is too high, and market rate goals will be easy to meet but affordability goals are far from ensured (Soloff & Zane, 2021).

Like any organization that has held power for a sustained period of time, SMRR is sometimes referred to in political discourse as ‘the establishment’ (Pinho, 2020). This was a talking point and framing device for both SMC candidates and local media in the

2020 election (Casuso, 2020). Despite SMRR's more moderate public stance on development, SMC's rhetoric positioned them as pro-development to the detriment of the city's quality of life. This may have been legitimized somewhat in the public's eyes by instances where SMRR-backed Councilmembers voted in favor of development, despite the disapproval of the organization's leadership (Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights, 2020, p 2). AAA's PAC donated \$5,000 to the SMC PAC (Office of the City Clerk, 2021), and AAGLA endorsed Phil Brock (Leidner-Peretz, 2020) who was one of their candidates.

In a major upset to SMRR's hegemony, three of the four SMC slate candidates won Council seats. A *Los Angeles Times* headline proclaimed "Santa Monica politics upended by pandemic, George Floyd protests and economic woes" (Pinho, 2020). When asked about the election's outcome, former City Manager Rick Cole cautioned that "it's easy to be critical. What's difficult is to find common answers to the real challenges facing communities. The community will suffer if people don't put aside the divisions of this election and work together for the common good" (ibid). The plot thickened further when Kevin McKeown unexpectedly announced his retirement from Council at a June 2021 meeting. McKeown had served on Council since 1998 (including two terms as Mayor) and is a renter with 45 years of tenure in his home (Farrell, 2021b). Later that month Council appointed Lana Negrete to fill his seat. Negrete was born and raised in Santa Monica and replaced McKeown as the only renter on Council. She is also the third Hispanic member of the current Council, which is now the most diverse Council in Santa Monica history. The final vote was between SMRR-endorsed RCB Commissioner Caroline Torosis and un-affiliated Negrete, which makes this the first Santa Monica City

Council without a SMRR-endorsed majority since the early 1980s (Catanzaro, 2021b).

In light of this significant shift in the political landscape it might be expected that some participants express discontent around some of the issues that precipitated it, and possibly relief that a new cohort has taken the helm. Alternatively, they could be experiencing feelings of unsettledness or place alienation because a new, more conservative group (relatively speaking) had taken power in the city.

4.5 Contextual Themes and Their Implications

This holistic overview of tenant protection policy and resources, civic culture and history, and the sociopolitical landscape identifies various factors that may inform the extent to which one feels ‘at home’ in their lifeworld, either through perception and/or through material outcomes. The themes outlined below were triangulated with interview findings from the following two chapters to create the study’s conceptual framework.

The limitations of tenant protections, resources and infrastructure

The breadth of information available to Santa Monica’s renter households is extensive, and the agencies responsible for offering tenant education and recourse are well-resourced comparable to other jurisdictions. The RCO’s phone and walk-in services are available to guide tenants through the research and advocacy process so they do not have to search through websites and documents for hours. In addition, the RCA’s newsletter includes the telephone number, email, website and office hours on the front corner. With the volume of ‘junk mail’ many households receive, it is of course unknown how many people actually look at this newsletter. Most likely, when a resident of rent

controlled housing experiences an issue there would be at minimum a friend or neighbor they could consult, who would be able to point them to either the RCO or SMRR's hotline.

Access to these resources may cultivate the perception of being supported and protected by the City, and foster housing stability and dwelling. At the same time, self-advocacy - even with this support - can be exhausting and time-consuming. What I have observed in my own work with tenants in Portland is that many people simply do not have the capacity for it. This is especially true in situations where someone is experiencing multiple stressors at once, such as a physical or mental illness or a loss of income. In these cases, one is faced with the choice to accept the conditions as they are, mitigate them if possible, or find alternative housing. While in Portland changing residences is a feasible option for many, a long-term tenant in Santa Monica who is paying far below market rent oftentimes cannot afford to move within the city.

Additionally, there is a fear factor associated with self-advocacy in a home setting that can have a deterrent effect. Even with the City's impressive suite of tenant protection policies, infrastructure and resources, landlords continue to find new and creative ways to outmaneuver their intended effects. This may lead some tenants to perceive that the landlord will find a way to remove them from their home or otherwise prevail in a dispute in spite of their efforts. As such, the degree to which these protections and resources contribute to feeling 'at home' and reduce residential alienation likely depends on a multitude of ontological security (Giddens, 1991) factors, such as personal capacity, mental and physical wellness, the presence of other stressors, financial resources, citizenship status, and class status. Additionally, elements like the personality of landlord

or property manager and the availability of free or low-cost legal services play a role in secure occupancy (Hulse, et al. 2011), which may inform perceptions of security and the decision to self-advocate.

The Sisyphean battle to feel ‘at home’ in rental housing

In my review of news media articles about tenant protections over the past four decades I illustrated a contentious dynamic between the landlord industry and the City that continues into the present day. One would be hard-pressed to argue that the City has not been responsive to evolving landlord and real estate industry tactics over the years, rolling out a series of policies, City Charter amendments, ballot initiatives, and resources for tenants. The events in the review were drawn primarily from the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Santa Monica Daily Press*, both of which have a wide readership within the area,¹⁷ with the latter available for free in both print and online editions. As such, it can be assumed that a substantial portion of Santa Monicans are aware of the City’s proactive approach to tenant rights on some level.

This ‘politics of place’ (Manzo, 2003) may create the impression among some renters that the City is advocating on their behalf, which could have the effect of making them feel both valued as community members and stable in their homes. On the other hand, constantly reading about other renters whose homes are threatened by Ellis Act evictions, habitability issues, harassment, AirBnB conversions and other circumstances may seriously undermine those feelings, leading to perpetual insecurity. In addition to these tactics, groups like AAGLA and AAA mount constant legal battles against the City,

¹⁷ The *Santa Monica Daily Press* has 81,500 website visits per week. <https://www.smdp.com/advertise>

which sends an unambiguous message of resentment toward the policies. For some Santa Monica renters who read these publications, this perennial battle might be disheartening and destabilizing, leading to place alienation.

A Tale of Two Cities: Long Term Tenants vs ‘The Revolving Door’

Data drawn from the RCB’s annual report shows a significant level of transience in the majority of the city’s rent-controlled housing, with turnover in more than half of residences occurring in the past 10 years. Given that longevity of tenure is a strong correlate of community attachment and its resulting insidedness (Trentelman, 2009; Riger & Lavrakas, 1981); place attachment (Lewicka, 2014) and dwelling (Werner, Altman & Oxley, 1986), this carries potentially negative implications for community fabric. It may present issues on the building scale, where a ‘revolving door’ of tenants makes it difficult to form relationships and trust with neighbors. AirBnB, in particular, has been critiqued for creating conditions in which residents experience noise and other disruptions from guests. In these instances, transitory occupants may not feel the same level of accountability to their neighbors that they would in their own home environment. High turnover within an apartment building also presents challenges to tenants who wish to form a tenant union or otherwise organize collectively to improve the conditions that produce residential alienation.

There is no data on whether these mobile tenants have left the city or purchased or rented other homes within it, so it is difficult to hypothesize how this may impact the social fabric of the community on the city scale. However, an influx of tenants who can afford market rents also changes the socioeconomic and sociocultural fabric of apartment

buildings, neighborhoods, and the city as a whole. The rent gap for some apartments within the same building can be in the thousands per month. While economic diversity within a community is not intrinsically negative, the fact that Santa Monica has some of the highest rents in the Los Angeles metro area creates a situation of extreme contrasts and bifurcation along socioeconomic lines. The resulting commercial gentrification due to this steady stream of high earners is another factor that may produce place alienation and diminish feelings of being ‘at home’ at the neighborhood and city scale. The real estate marketing language cited in the next chapter section gestures at this by using descriptors like “high-income professional renters,” and referencing global tech companies like Google and Facebook that have offices in the area.

A City at A Crossroads

If *Apartment Age* is any indication (see next chapter), Santa Monica’s identity as The People’s Republic is still salient in landlord discourse. But beyond the enduring existence of SMRR and its (recently usurped) hegemony in local politics, it is unknown to what extent that legacy resonates with renters in 2021. Activists who were involved in the campaigns of that era still speak proudly of their work and its meaning, and many of them are still fixtures on the political scene, but the recent upheaval on City Council suggests that that tide may be turning. SMRR is struggling to differentiate itself from other political factions as the people’s champion, and is facing a loss of public trust due to high levels of discontent with issues like over-development, traffic, public safety and homelessness. Some of these issues - such as homelessness - are prevalent throughout urban areas on the West Coast. The tension between preserving sense of place for

existing residents, and a mandate to increase density in order to accommodate more residents, is also playing out across the West Coast and beyond. Both of these are what planners and social scientists might call “wicked problems.” Frustration over these issues only seems to be deepening over time. It often falls on the shoulders of city leaders, who in this case have been primarily SMRR-affiliated. Thus the future of SMRR’s progressive vision and political hegemony hangs in the balance.

The sea change on City Council signals not only a loss of faith in SMRR leadership, but deep discontent with conditions in the city more broadly. This message, broadcast loudly by the electorate, may result in place alienation (Tuttle, 2021) for some residents. The myriad Facebook groups I joined to recruit participants for this research are filled with posts and comments about Santa Monica which convey the impression that residents who participate on that platform have strong attachments to the city, and believe the quality of life is declining and it is no longer the place that it once was. At the same time, there is no consensus on how the problems should be addressed, which suggests division among the city’s residents. This factionalization and discord during an already difficult time may also lead to place alienation (Tuttle, 2021; Manzo, 2003).

Policy Loopholes You Can Drive a Truck Through

Though Santa Monica has some of the strongest tenant protections in the country, loopholes like the Ellis Act and the exemptions to ‘just cause’ eviction policy have had a devastating impact on the city’s renter households and housing affordability. Not only have thousands of households been displaced over the 35 years the Ellis Act has been in effect, but you would most likely be hard pressed to find a Santa Monica renter who has

never heard of it. Though the city has placed every legally permissible restriction around Ellis Act evictions, building owners continue to employ the policy. In 2019 92 rental homes were withdrawn. Many tenants are probably aware that receiving a cash-for-keys offer most likely signals that the owner's next move will be to serve the tenant with an Ellis Act eviction, or perhaps simply harass the tenant until they relent. For this reason, even the sale of a building is likely to trigger anxiety about housing instability.

These practices are incentivized by the other major policy loophole; vacancy decontrol under Costa Hawkins. The findings on market language in the next chapter suggest that maximizing returns by closing the rent gap is an attractive prospect and a common business practice. One ad touts the opportunity to remove a triplex from rent control with an owner move-in. The other ads do not include specific advice along these lines, but by using language like “upside potential” and “value-add” - along with specific percentages for potential increased returns - it is implied that removing existing residents is a savvy business decision. To this end, even deep knowledge of tenant protections may not mitigate residential alienation that comes from perceptions of housing instability when a building is sold, or a tenant otherwise receives the impression that the owner would like them to leave. This is especially salient for long-term tenants, as there is the largest unrealized return with their tenancies.

Chapter Five : Landlord Discourse and Market Language

For many tenants, the decisions and behaviors of landlords and property managers have substantial impact on the residential experience. Much as the ideology of homeownership and private property has significant implications for renters - including social status in their communities, policymaking, and the allocation of public resources - the rhetoric and culture of the multifamily housing industry is theorized to inform material outcomes as well.

Inclusion of this supplementary contextual data was inspired by Fields and Uffer's (2016) work on the financialization of housing, which looks at how market contexts and investor strategies increase existing crises in housing affordability and stability. They connect landlord trends like 'upscaling' (performing expensive renovations for the purpose of raising rents) with increasing precarity for tenants, and cite research by community-based organizations who found that complaints of tenant harassment surged in properties after they were purchased by private equity firms.

Making those kind of direct causal connections between macro level factors and the individual experience is beyond the scope of my research, and this chapter is not intended to substitute for much-needed inquiry about landlord behavior and decisions. There is of course no way to know if my participants' landlords and property managers subscribe to these values and/or if they impact their business practices. However, the fact that AAGLA has been a major actor in the industry for over 100 years and recently expanded to cover more of the Los Angeles metro area is a strong statement about its efficacy and power.

The first five sections of the chapter illustrate five themes drawn from a review of AAGLA's trade magazine, *Apartment Age*. The final section on the rental housing market and the language that is used in multifamily sale listings illustrates the prevalence of industry practices like upscaling lower-grade properties. These practices are highly impactful for residents, as they often require removal of long-term tenants. As such, this chapter provides important context for interpreting participant experiences. The content maps onto factors two (rental and real estate market) and four (landlord and property manager: personality and business model) in Group One on my concept map, and was instrumental in the process of triangulating the interview and supplementary data to create my final conceptual framework.

5.1 Overview

Apartment Age, is typically between 110 and 120 pages, and is published monthly. Much of the content is practical advice and information that is presented in a neutral or mostly neutral tone. It includes articles on property management, legislative and lobbying updates, overviews of lawsuits against eviction moratoria and other tenant protections, legal questions from readers, best practices for maintenance, industry trends, tenant screening tips, updates on local ordinances, earthquake preparedness, best practices for interacting with tenants, humor pieces, and a section for Korean owners. There are a multitude of advertisements for various goods and services, such as cabinetry and other fixtures, seismic retrofitting, financial planning, mold abatement, electrical infrastructure, tenant screening, and HVAC infrastructure. There are multiple ads for eviction services in every issue, as well as political advertisements.

There is also a substantial body of content that articulates an holistic worldview on the state of the residential rental industry and being a landlord. Each issue opens with messages from the President and from the Executive Director. Daniel Yukelson has served as the Executive Director for the duration of the review period, and Earle Vaughan was the President until January 2021, when the role was assumed by Cheryl Turner. As the organization's leaders, their columns speak directly to the membership, and they often use strong, galvanizing rhetoric that concludes with an appeal for member donations. In addition to these monthly columns there are also guest editorials and articles presented as reportage, but that contain extensive editorial language beyond what is generally accepted within basic journalistic standards. These authors are sometimes economists or attorneys, and are usually associated with conservative institutions and publications like the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, *The Patriot Post*, the Charles Koch Institute, The Heritage Foundation, The Cato Institute, The Foundation for Economic Education and the Ayn Rand Institute. Many of these articles focus on the unfairness, unlawfulness, or misguided nature of various pro-tenant policies and practices, and their threat to the industry's sustainability. Executive Director Daniel Yukelson has authored some of the magazine's most bombastic pieces, which is significant as he serves in a prominent leadership role and also acts as public spokesperson for the group.

This review ranges from August 2019 through July 2021, and thus captures the magazine's content before and during COVID. The tone and type of information included over the time-period remained fairly consistent, with expected topical variations as pertains to COVID policy, challenges, and best practices. As illustrated below, views expressed on both pre- and COVID-era policies and practices create a narrative of

unfairness and undue burden that is framed as being un-American in its denial of property rights.

5.2 An industry at war

Editorial discourse in *Apartment Age* often contains language that suggests the industry is engaged in a battle against forces (tenant organizers, elected officials, etc.) who wish to destroy or subjugate it. Yukelson (2020a) describes rent control as a “continuing war on rental property owners,” (p 51) and credits it with both the end of the ‘Golden Age of California’ and his decision to sell his investment property. In his November 2020 column, Vaughan frames the previous three years as a noble fight against the injustices of rent control, using the words *defense*, *skirmish*, *battle*, *attacks*, and *war*. He describes COVID-era eviction moratoriums as the industry being “attacked by a new housing policy,” (p 14) with no acknowledgement of its implementation as an emergency response with a public health rationale. The omnipresent threat of tenant activism, an over-zealous government, and the actions of other misinformed actors creates an environment in which property owners must perpetually fight for their rights.

5.3 Narratives of Unfairness and Oppression: The Landlord’s Burden

Virtually any policy that regulates the rental market or provides support to tenants is perceived as unfair. One article argues that just-cause eviction policy, rent boards, tenant unions and relocation benefits are even worse than rent control, and describes relocation benefits as an “involuntary redistribution of wealth from housing providers to renters” (Duringer, 2019, p 84). Other injustices include being “forced” to accept Section

8 vouchers, being “forced” to disclose rents on rental registries, and a proposed vacancy tax (Yukelson, 2019, p 12). Yukelson’s March 2020 column portrays landlords as victims, demonized by public opinion and persecuted by policy. The situation is “never fair. We are just trying to do the best job we can by keeping our renters, who are our customers, in their homes, safe and sound. We are, in fact, the ones providing roofs over the heads of those living in the communities we ourselves live in and own rental properties” (p 17).

The language of persecution appears again in Yukelson’s May 2020 column, where he describes rent control as a “public policy focused on villainizing and overregulating property owners to achieve affordable housing” (p 19). COVID is perceived as having ushered in a new era of unfair policies and landlord martyrdom. In his first column of the pandemic era, titled “A Moratorium on Evictions? No F-Ing Way!,” Vaughan (2020a) exclaims, “sometimes, I just wish that California would really sink into the ocean!” (p 13). He characterizes eviction moratoriums as a “punishment” and complains that “We property owners’ investments and livelihoods are always expendable in the eyes of our political leaders” (ibid, p 14). Yaron Brook (2020) of the Ayn Rand Institute uses similar language of martyrdom to describe the plight of landlords, the “property owners who make it possible for us to rent rather than buy a home” (p 96). Under COVID eviction moratoriums landlords are “sacrificial lambs who will bear the brunt of the economic devastation of the pandemic.” Brook suggests a moratorium on government regulation instead.

Yukelson’s appeals to members for financial support often make use of this rhetoric of oppression and the quest for freedom and fairness. His September 2020

column outlines the tribulations landlords face due to COVID-era tenant protections like eviction moratoria, concluding, “Our crusade against the tyranny of injustice and unfair rent regulation is justified” (p 17). Anti-harassment ordinances are described as an “ordeal that has been inflicted on rental property owners” (Yukelson, 2021a, p 19), rather than a safeguard against bad actors. The following month, in a particularly flamboyant rhetorical flourish, Yukelson (2021b) connects the traditional Passover song *Dayenu* - which is essentially about gratitude at having survived oppression with God’s support - with the unfairness and burden of regulations on the rental housing industry.

5.4 The Undesirable Tenant

While the magazine *does* include articles that stress the importance of responding to tenant complaints in a timely manner and cultivating a congenial relationship, there are other instances where renters who advocate for themselves are described as problematic and to be avoided. In “The Property Manager’s Guide to Renter Selection” the author guides readers to identify “difficult renters,” who “complain about nonexistent problems, and in some cases wrongfully sue” landlords (Crown, 2019, p 80). This builds on a popular landlord trope about predatory tenant attorneys (*all* tenant attorneys) who take advantage of legal services funding for low-income tenants to initiate frivolous lawsuits for their non-paying clients.

Other authors adopt a paternalistic view toward tenants. An article titled “Learn How To Deal With Dirty Tenants” by the Fast Evict Law Group (2021) includes a list of evidence that indicates a property is in distress due to a problem tenant. In addition to hoarding and some other behaviors that can be reasonably attributed to the resident, they

also list things like pests and mold. They advise owners and managers to “Make it your responsibility to visit the property frequently after tenants move in or whenever you feel that there are issues and point out the locations that require regular cleaning” (p 101).¹⁸

An article by the similarly named Fast Eviction Service titled “Obvious Signs That Should Cause You To Avoid Accepting A Tenant” (2020) lists eight red flags to be aware of during the screening process. While a few of these seem fairly standard, others contain value judgements and assumptions far beyond typical screening criteria. Multiple employers in two years may signal that “the tenant does not have a serious attitude towards work,” being in a rush to find a home to rent may indicate they are “looking for a place to hide,” arriving to view the residence with many people may mean they are “planning something,” and someone who offers a large sum of money in advance is potentially suspicious (p 95).

5.5 Housing as A Commodity, Property as Freedom

Tenant protections’ encroachment on sacrosanct private property rights is a consistent rhetorical thread in *Apartment Age*. One article aptly describes the founding fathers’ vision of property and liberty as “inextricably entwined” (Swearer & Canaparo, 2019, p 66). In a guest editorial, Jon Coupal (2020) of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association frames the landlord struggle against rent control in the context of the larger struggle against government interference that is the cornerstone of American ideals about individualism and freedom:

“Rights, properly understood, are restrictions on government actions, not an entitlement to free stuff. We have a ‘right’ to speak, to assemble and to

¹⁸ This approach may fall under local definitions of harassment.

practice our religious beliefs. We have a right to be free from unreasonable searches and seizures and, yes, a right to bear arms. This is the reason we have a Bill of Rights, not a Bill of Freebies.” (p 17)

In “California’s War on Private Property Rights,” Susan Shelley (2020) of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers’ Association writes about the threat posed by Oakland housing justice activists Moms 4 Housing, in addition to regulatory policies like rent control and minimum wage. She argues that the rhetoric of ‘housing as a human right’ is merely a right to someone else’s property, and that there “can’t be a right to anything that has to be provided by other people” (p 57). In “Prediction for 2030: A Government Take Over of Rental Housing” Roger Valdez references *In Defense of Housing* (Madden & Marcuse, 2018), and speculates that the ‘housing is a human right’ ethos will lead to a nationalization of housing, and to America becoming a socialist country.

The red menace continues to be evoked in landlord discourse about Santa Monica, with the city referred to twice as The People’s Republic of Santa Monica over the course of the review period. In one short update on the RCB’s annual rent increase the unnamed author opined that “most of the members of the Rent Control Board must not believe in private property ownership” because they were also considering a rent freeze (*Apartment Age*, 2020, p 49). The accompanying graphic used a red background and yellow stars, evoking imagery from the People’s Republic of China.

While some articles acknowledge that housing is a necessity of life, it is still unambiguously understood as a commodity within a free market framework. In the COVID-era, analogies between tenants not paying rent under eviction moratoria and receiving free goods from a commercial establishment made a number of appearances in *Apartment Age*. In “A Comparison Between Artichoke Hearts and Residential Rental

Real Estate,” Joshua Stein (2021) draws out an extended metaphor where the specialty food and rental housing are analogous commodity goods which should be subject to the same market logic. He concludes that not paying rent is the same thing as shoplifting. Turner (2021) agrees, employing the grocery shoplifting analogy in her April column. She also evokes the rhetoric of fairness, writing, “As housing providers who have sacrificed to make investments in rental property, we are the ones who are *fiscally responsible ‘adults’* [italics mine]...” (p 13). This statement about the renters and responsibility reflects some of the same views held by pro-real estate incumbents in Santa Monica City Council in the late 1970s (Capek & Gilderbloom, 1992).

Similarly, economist Walter Block (2021) likens nonpayment of rent to stealing a service like a haircut or massage, and wonders “what is it that is so special about domiciles that failure to pay for them should be singled out for kid glove treatment...?” (p 104). Seen through the lens of market logic:

“Evictions economize on space; they are a necessary condition for downsizing. Preventing them means more homelessness, not less...Evictions seem callous, but they are not. Rather, they are the way the market maximizes human welfare when we face economic difficulty” (p 105).

The notion of a value-neutral free market that allocates resources and people in a pareto optimal way goes hand-in-hand with the assertion that “all economists agree” rent control is a bad policy. Attorneys Burrus and Spiegelman (2021) expand on this discourse with the assertion that under rent control people do not “economize” their housing choices, which results in two people each having their own home, rather than “cramming” into one home, which reduces supply. They conclude that rent control is a price ceiling and thus achieves the predicted result, which is that “consumers over use the

product and producers under produce it” (p 89). This abstraction of economic language and frameworks can also be found in much of the quantitative research about rent control, which uses constructs like the ‘housing misallocation’ argument (Glaeser & Luttmer, 2003) to obscure the lived experience of human beings.

5.6 Rent Control: A Perennial Thorn In One’s Side

Despite its implementation in Santa Monica, Los Angeles, Beverly Hills and West Hollywood roughly four decades ago, the efficacy and legality of rent control continues to be a topic of vigorous debate. Instead of regulations on the rental housing market, *Apartment Age* authors advocate for a free market and loosened restrictions on zoning and building permits in order to increase housing supply and thus affordability. In one monthly column, Yukelson (2020a) blames rent control for severe housing shortages, skyrocketing rents, gentrification, and even homelessness. He also claims that it disincentivizes homeownership (pp 51-52).

A common trope is that many rent-controlled homes are inhabited by the wealthy, which is ostensibly the opposite of the policy’s stated intent¹⁹. In “Rent Control: A Cautionary Tale of the City of Santa Monica,” the author wonders why cities cannot ‘means test’ prospective tenants of rent controlled housing, so that owners do not subsidize wealthy tenants (Sherry, 2020, p 71).²⁰ Libertarian-conservative writer Hannah Cox (2021) echoes this sentiment, writing “it is often the wealthy who hoard the rent-

¹⁹ I am not aware of rent control legislation that explicitly states rent controlled homes are intended for occupancy by residents within a specific income range.

²⁰ Bear in mind that under Costa-Hawkins’ vacancy decontrol provision, landlords all over California may charge market rents to new tenants, which in Santa Monica and many other jurisdictions are substantial.

controlled properties. A select few benefit from rent control - while the rest of the city pays the price” (p 97). Like other authors who have made this claim in *Apartment Age*, she does not cite a source to support it.

Apartment Age contains a number of pieces that outline potential legal challenges to the policy. In his September 2019 column, Vaughan optimistically hopes that once Ruth Bader Ginsburg is no longer on the U.S. Supreme Court, the conservative majority on the bench will lead to a decision that rent control is indeed unconstitutional. He is heartened by how the “majority of current justices have shown a willingness to overrule past decisions that impair property rights and keep us off the beaten path to socialism and the ultimate destruction of property rights” (p 10). Attorney Frank Weiser (2020) is similarly hopeful that California’s various rent control ordinances may be challenged under the Fifth Amendment’s takings clause.

5.7 Market Language and the ‘Rent Gap’

Rent Control Commissioner Anastasia Foster directed my attention to real estate listings for rent controlled buildings, which often emphasize as a selling point a certain number of apartments “delivered vacant.” According to Foster these listings use language like “long-term upside potential” of a given percentage, and include charts that compare current rents with potential market rents. The implication is clear: remove the current tenants and increase your profit margin (Foster interview, 2021). This observation is supported by research about the ‘financialization of housing’, which examines landlord business practices to maximize returns (Fields & Uffer, 2014; Fields, 2017).

I surveyed all of the listings of multifamily buildings for sale on LoopNet.com for the week of August 2nd, 2021. I excluded two- and three-unit properties that may be exempt from rent control due to owner occupancy, unless the listing noted otherwise. The average price per unit for this time period was \$587,157, compared with \$464,966 from January through May of 2019 (Kaplan, 2019). All except one of the properties were ‘class c’, which are typically over 20 years old and in need of renovation and other improvements. This 26.27% increase in value over a period of about two years contrasts with the rental housing industry’s narrative of persecution.

According to the data collected (see Appendix E), nearly half of the listings included language like *value-add* and *rental upside potential*, which suggests the new buyer increase their profit through redevelopment or securing market rents somehow. The listings tout proximity to various amenities and work sites, the transience of the target demographic (high earners), and the inaccessibility of the housing market - all of which underscore the role local context plays in determining property values and rents (versus value added by the property owner) (George, 1879; Barton, 2010; Hern, 2016):

“At the epicenter of Silicon Beach, Santa Monica is home to world-class technology, media, and entertainment companies such as Google, Facebook, Hulu, Electronic Arts, among many others, providing a steady source of high-income professional renters.”

“This exceptional hi-growth, hi employment market provides a steady source of high-income professional renters.”

“A savvy investor will be able to capitalize on the renter’s neighborhood that is Sunset Park for decades to come. With a median home price of \$2.2M, residents enjoy the affordability and flexibility of renting as opposed to buying a home.”

As the data illustrates, the speculative potential to increase profits in some of these properties through various policy loopholes is substantial. The value is inflated accordingly, which pressures buyers to remove long term tenants by using cash-for-keys, the Ellis Act, or harassment tactics. This potential to yield higher returns by maximizing rents is what Santa Monica's various policies on tenant relocation, Ellis Act guidelines, and tenant harassment were implemented in response to. As Fields & Uffer (2014) write, "Areas of high demand afford a strategy of upgrading, modernizing or otherwise developing properties, yielding profits from increased rental income and/or the sale of upgraded properties to tenants or new investors" (p 5).²¹

In conclusion, while the rhetoric of AAGLA's leaders probably does not resonate with every single Santa Monica landlord, it is hard to imagine how members who read *Apartment Age* year after year would not be influenced by its worldview to some extent. Additionally, people who already hold these views may be attracted to the industry, amplifying this perspective within it. The framing of housing as a commodity in particular is probably uncontroversial with most landlords (and non-landlords). To that point, AAA's website characterizes Santa Monica's rent control policy as "radical," and their pitch for membership implores local landlords to "enlist in the army - fight Santa Monica's war on owners." This perspective is diametrically opposed to SMRR's progressive vision of tenants' moral right to their communities and homes (rather than 'units'). This is exactly why the 'housing as a human right' discourse of the past several

²¹ Fields and Uffer's (2014) research focuses on private equity real estate investment specifically. However, because those firms operate in the same local markets as small LLCs and sole proprietors, arguably the business model for any entity will be determined by the sale price, financing arrangement, and minimum profit margin desired.

years is so threatening to *Apartment Age*'s contributors. If one believes that housing is a commodity comparable to an artichoke heart - and not a *home*, as a homeowner might experience it - it is easy to see how regulations that limit returns on that commodity could be perceived as deeply unfair and burdensome. To add fuel to this fire, the discourse of private property rights is evoked as a direct connection between the landlord's unjust plight and the foundational principles of America.

This market logic also applies to framing like the 'housing misallocation' argument, which essentially suggests that people who rent their homes should live in residences that are matched to their family size and work location in a pareto optimal way and continue to change dwellings as these circumstances evolve, much as one would purchase a new pair of jeans if they gained ten pounds. This logic does not seem to apply to owner-occupied homes, which are valued for their purported effect of stabilizing households and communities. Meanwhile, landlords are re-branded as "housing providers," who heroically offer an essential service to people who may not wish to own.

All this said, the commodity view of housing - combined with the perception of injustice at the hands of The People's Republic of Santa Monica - may result in some landlords feeling a certain reluctance to do more than the bare minimum of maintenance and upkeep, if that. It may also encourage some landlords to attempt to circumvent the tenant protections entirely, either through legal or extralegal means. Additionally, the combination of policy loopholes and lucrative rent gaps makes this an attractive course of action. The combination of these conditions has grave repercussions for residents of Santa Monica's rent-controlled housing, who may experience residential alienation or displacement as a result.

Chapter Six: The Person-Place Relationship

Findings from qualitative analysis of 30 interviews illustrate the complex nature of the person-place relationship. Most participants feel ‘at home’ in their residences and have strong attachments to their home environments on multiple scales. At the same time, some must manage challenging conditions with their landlord or property manager, which are dimensions of residential alienation. Those will be discussed in more depth in the next chapter. Additionally, some participants experience place alienation on the city - and to a lesser extent the neighborhood level - due to a range of factors.

The first section of this chapter illustrates the nature of participant attachment sentiments to various scales of the home environment. The following sections examine different aspects of the person-place relationship that comprise attachment²², dwelling, residential alienation and place alienation, and are organized by scale (residence, neighborhood and city). The section on residence explores participants’ sense of ‘at homeness’, salient characteristics of the space, caretaking behaviors, and the importance of social fabric. The third section looks at the person-place relationship at the neighborhood and city scales. It covers attitudes and opinions, salient environmental features, the importance of character and sense of place, citywide issues, and the political climate. These two scales are groups together because participants often blurred the boundaries between them, possibly due to the city’s small geographical size.

²² Place attachment is comprised of affect, cognition, and practice (Altman & Low (1992). These elements are explored in sections two and three, whereas section one is concerned with the articulation of the attachment itself.

All participant names are pseudonyms and demographic details have been added when relevant. Names have been used to enhance readability, however it is not necessary to remember participant details throughout the course of the document. There are several instances where participant demographics relate to themes in the findings, but generally there is more similarity across demographic lines than not. This is a significant finding in itself.

6.1 Attachment and The Person-Place Relationship

Place attachment is both a driver and an outcome of dwelling and ‘at homeness’. Expressions of attachment differ from general positive sentiments about place, in that their subject is the *relationship* between person and place. For example, “Santa Monica is a great city” is a depersonalized value statement, whereas “I love living in Santa Monica,” foregrounds the speaker's feelings about the city.

All participants expressed some level of attachment to their home environments on different scales and in different ways. Several spoke emphatically about never wanting to leave their homes. Vanessa recalls how, when she initially moved in four decades ago she immediately decided she was never going to move: “They’d have to drag me out with my fingernail scratches on the wall right there. They'd literally have to drag me out kicking and screaming.” Diane is in her early 80s and plans to stay in her apartment for the rest of her life. She explained, “I’m going to stay here until I die and they carry me out.” Christina and her husband are close with their neighbors, are very comfortable in their home, and could see “riding into the sunset” there. Joyce can also see “dying here” in her apartment.

Selena will never give up her apartment willingly. She has heard about people who give up their rent-controlled apartments to move in with a romantic partner, and that is a mistake she is not willing to make. In the event that she does lose her apartment,²³ she would “literally mourn” it, and it would be a “huge emotional loss.” She knows people who have been displaced from their rent-controlled apartments after decades and have cried in response: “I know that’s exactly how I would feel because that’s my attachment to it...it’s more than just an apartment.”

Several participants also expressed attachment to their neighborhoods. Rena loves Sunset Park and explained that there is no other neighborhood where she would want to live within the city. In particular, she appreciates proximity to Santa Monica College and all it has to offer. Raquel’s attachment to the Pico Neighborhood is rooted in biographical associations. In addition to being able to walk to the market or church, she likes being close to the house where she grew up, and how when she walks up 19th Street she is reminded of families she has known in the past. After living in the Pico Neighborhood for almost her entire life Mariana would miss the community:

“...after being there for as long as I've been, it's like a family, like, I know all of my neighbors...we all talk, we get together, and we have little block parties. We've done this for years, you know. So it's a very enriched community feeling. I feel safe there...I know when someone's outside, they're keeping an eye out on everyone.”

For Nate, Sunset Park is the perfect balance between the suburbs where he grew up, and some of the more urban areas where he lived when he first moved to Los Angeles. His neighborhood now feels like home, and although he and his family plan on upgrading their housing at some point in the future, “it feels like a neighborhood and a

²³ Selena informed me in early 2022 that her building was sold.

place where, if we're here for a long time, we would be content." If they do stay in their home throughout their son's school-age years all of the public schools he would attend are within a half mile. Nate's attachment to the neighborhood is partially connected to the atmosphere, but it also centers around the ways in which its amenities and resources support his family, and in particular his young son.

About one third of study participants expressed a strong attachment to Santa Monica at some point in the course of their interview. While some people used the word "attached" others expressed how difficult it would be emotionally to move out of the city. Ramona, who is being displaced from her home by the new owner's family member, considered her housing options. Faced with the reality that she cannot afford to buy a home in Santa Monica, she wonders how close she would be able to stay: "I wouldn't be able to move too far, because I would miss all the community. I would miss my neighbors. And because my heart is here in Santa Monica." Other participants who grew up in the city expressed similar sentiments. Mariana has nightmares about leaving Santa Monica. She describes herself as being "deeply rooted," to the extent that she cannot tell what she would miss about it unless she were to actually leave. Though she has considered moving "100 million times," she cannot envision being as happy anywhere else. Christina has mixed feelings about the city, explaining that "I hate it, but it's home...I don't know where else I would be as comfortable as I am here." Ricky shared critiques of city leadership and other local actors throughout the interview. Even given these elements he explained,

"Man, look I love this place. I live here and I...you know I say these criticisms, very much in that way that I would - I feel like I'm talking

about myself in many ways. I feel like I can be critical because Santa Monica, for better or worse, is in my soul. It's where I grew up."

Growing up in a military family. Heather moved around frequently before settling in her home four decades ago. With the exception of Santa Monica, she never had the desire to stay long term: "I never felt attached to any part of the country in America that I would even really consider staying...that's why it's like a great feeling - it's like 'gee I belong here'." It means a lot to her to feel at home here because she "never felt at home anywhere." Joyce feels lucky to live in Santa Monica and would be "hard pressed" to find another place where she would feel more at home. She also feels like she belongs there. Despite Amy's tempestuous relationship with her landlord, she loves Santa Monica and has determined that it is worth remaining in her home in order to continue living there. Gina has lived in Santa Monica for most of her adult life, and experiences deep anxiety about being displaced from an environment that has become familiar and the city that has become home. Patrick listed the city's many amenities, describing it as an "idyllic place to live," and adding that he is "blessed" to be living there.

6.2 Residence

Feeling 'at home' or not 'at home' in the residence

The vast majority of participants (26) reported feeling 'at home' in their residences, while three had mixed feelings, and one did not feel at home at all. Some articulated feelings of being 'at home' when describing their apartment or what they like about it, while others answered in response to a direct question about whether or not they felt at home. Asked what makes their residence feel like home, the top answers were the *ability to personalize the space* (8 participants) and *having good neighbors* (6).

Friendliness, mutual support, consideration, and sense of community are aspects of the building's social environment that contribute to feelings of being at home.

Personalization includes creating a cozy or comfortable space, filling the home with items that have personal meaning, and the ability to paint or make other modifications.

These interventions are different types of 'spatial appropriation', one of the main components of dwelling (Korosec-Serfaty, 1986). Daphne explained,

“When it's four white walls it's really so generic and sterile and it's harder to make an environment feel like home. whereas if you can paint the walls or put carpet down or whatever colors that you like you can make it feel more like it's more like your own home. then you stay longer.”

For Katya, feelings of safety and stability, combined with the ability to personalize the space, are key to feeling at home: “It feels safe. I feel like I can just exist. I don't feel like I'm imminently at risk of losing it. I feel like I have the capacity and resources and permission to make it my own space. And that's what makes it feel like home.”

The role of time was also a significant component of feeling at home. Nate's apartment has been the setting of several important milestones. It was where he and his wife lived when they got engaged and married, and where they lived when their son was born. Two other participants mentioned the importance of having raised their children in the home. For others, the duration of time *itself* was important. As Patrick pointed out, he has lived in his home for two thirds of his life. Dave identified “time spent” as the main element that makes his bungalow feel like home.

Mixed feelings about home were attributed to several factors, which differed for each participant. Lisa feels at home most of the time, but described some “outside

elements that aren't so nice" in the alley behind her apartment and adjacent areas. She theorizes these are probably related to homelessness in the area. The behaviors include yelling in the alley, scoping out the complex's carport through a window, breaking into residents' possessions in the carport, and banging on a neighbor's door in the middle of the day. Amy, who has a contentious relationship with her landlord/manager, described her feelings toward her home as a "begrudging acceptance," explaining that she did not envision this apartment as a long-term residence when she first moved in, but cannot afford to stay in Santa Monica otherwise. Karli, a young renter who has lived with her partner in their apartment for three years, attributes her mixed feelings to the limitations on the feasibility of personalizing what is most likely a short-term space that they do not own.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Overall, the pandemic did not have a significant impact on the extent to which participants feel 'at home' or not 'at home' in their residences. Even individuals who had difficult relationships with their landlord or manager did not report experiences in this area that they attributed to the pandemic. Notably, only two participants deferred rent under the provisions of the COVID eviction moratorium, so this finding may have been different had that been more prevalent. Both of those individuals were able to make arrangements with their landlords without incident. Two other people who had diminished income due to COVID elected to continue paying rent because they were able to.

Several participants developed a deeper relationship with their home during the first year of the pandemic. Georgia has a small balcony, which was her “saving grace.” While the city and county were under mandatory stay-at-home orders she was able to sit on her balcony in the sunshine, listen to the wind chimes and enjoy the view. During this time she had a realization that Santa Monica - and not the country she is originally from - is where she feels most at home: “I’ve ensconced myself here so much that I realized I don’t want to leave this. I’m very happy in this house.” Ricky felt very fortunate to live alone and not worry about giving COVID to a roommate or family member. He adapted to the anxiety of the pandemic by getting “a little too used to isolating” in his apartment, which has been a “comfort blanket.” Working from home during the early days of COVID made Daphne reflect on how lucky she is to live in her neighborhood, with its natural beauty. Both Sharon and Amy became more familiar with their neighborhoods by taking frequent walks, which has led to a deeper appreciation of their environment.

Use of affective and gratitude language

In addition to articulating their sense of dwelling and being ‘at home’ on multiple scales, nearly half of study participants offered expressions of gratitude and good fortune vis a vis their housing. As Heather articulated, “I do absolutely every day say, you know, thank you God for my apartment because I have a stable place that I can live in. It’s a haven.” Nicholas feels fortunate to be living in an apartment where he has ample space to be comfortable. Nate has “lucked out basically into getting this apartment,” which has been a significant source of stability as his family’s first home. For Gina, it is a privilege to live in a city that is a popular vacation destination, and her rent-controlled apartment

facilitates that access. Diane also appreciates the ocean breeze and living within walking distance of the ocean, which she feels “very lucky” to have enjoyed for over 35 years in her home. Despite the occasional stresses of her living situation, Sharon feels “really grateful to live here.” Though she has a tempestuous relationship with her landlord, Amy recognizes that she is lucky to have inexpensive rent. Dave feels “pretty fortunate to have kept this place” for the past 20 years. Even if he obtains another residence elsewhere he would like to keep his Santa Monica home.

Attitudes and characteristics

The ‘attitudes’ codes were applied when a participant responded to a value-neutral question (e.g., “tell me about your apartment”) by indicating an *opinion* about the subject in their answer. 14 participants expressed positive sentiments and three expressed negative ones, with one instance of overlap. Participants who expressed positive sentiments about their apartments pointed to physical aspects like the layout, amount of space, availability of outdoor areas to relax, character or ‘feel’, social atmosphere of the building, presence of personal decor, location, walkability, and natural light. As mentioned above, social fabric of the building was also an important element for several people. Selena, who has become friends with the on-site landlord and their family over the years, explained that the apartment is simply home. She described the importance of that relationship and added that the apartment has given her stability in life:

“Well I mean I almost feel emotional about it...this is my home. The owners of the building - the daughters now run the building- I mean I feel close to them and to their dad. I mean again this apartment has offered me a stability that I don't think I would have had.”

Two of the three participants who expressed a negative attitude in their answers mentioned physical elements of the apartment (e.g., “the stove sucks”), and the third explained that she would prefer to live alone but has to have a roommate for financial reasons.

Participants were also asked what they liked best and what could be better about their apartment. Answers to the first question can be grouped into two broad and sometimes overlapping categories: “meets my needs” includes many tangible facets of the apartment, like storage, parking, a good floor plan, and adequate space. Some people framed the strengths of their home in comparison to past residences. Bonnie appreciated having enough room to store a large package of toilet paper after living in much smaller apartments on the East Coast, while Katya enjoyed having a more substantial kitchen than in her studio apartment. The temperate local climate was another common thread, and includes proximity to the beach, having cross ventilation and access to an ocean breeze, and having a private outdoor area. Many participants also enjoy the external amenities their apartment’s location afforded, such as shops, restaurants, libraries and parks. Several participants who are or have been parents of school-aged children mentioned proximity to Santa Monica’s highly rated schools. Joyce, who lives in the Wilmont neighborhood, painted a vivid picture of what she likes about her home’s location, ending with a description of the neighborhood’s sense of place:

“The location is magnificent. It is nice on Montana, I’m across from Pavilions - I’m like next door to Wells Fargo, I can walk nine blocks to the beach. I’m surrounded by coffee shops, restaurants. And the breeze of the ocean. I can see a sunset every night. And it’s basically kind of like a village. It’s villagy, and I like that.”

In addition to these more pragmatic material elements, many participants also described various ways their apartment “makes me feel.” The words *quiet*, *safe*, *home* and *comfortable* were all used several times, and were connected to location, security features, and decor. One participant appreciates that her hands-off landlord gives her free reign to personalize and improve her apartment. Others enjoy the social atmosphere of their building, whether they are just on friendly terms with neighbors or are actually friends. Several participants who live in older properties, built in the 1920s through 1960s mentioned the home's interior architectural character as a positive feature. Connection to nature is also valued, as experienced through views of trees and sunsets, and appreciation of the local flora and fauna. Katya described the process of decorating her patio, connecting the space with feelings of comfort and wellbeing. Nate articulated feelings of peacefulness that he sometimes experiences looking out of the window above his bed:

“What is nice is that that's kind of my view when I lay in bed, if I'm reading or just waking up for a nap or something. And all I can see is the tree tops and the blue sky. And that, you know, that's something that I do like about the apartment is that you know, Santa Monica still feels pretty urban, but...looking at that window makes me feel like we do kind of have our own space, even though we live in an apartment, and it's just kind of a peaceful thing, you know, not too much noise.”

The themes of “meets my needs” and “how it makes me feel” illustrate different (and sometimes overlapping) ways that participants are supported by their home environments.

Participants were also asked about aspects of the apartment that could be improved. The question was phrased in an aspirational way, rather than asking them to list negative elements. Of the 15 participants who answered this question, the majority expressed a general level of satisfaction alongside their suggested interventions, which

were mostly physical in nature. Desired minor improvements include updated bathrooms, new floors, removing “cottage cheese” from the ceiling, an onsite manager, being able to live alone, more space and more light. Four participants mentioned noise from the neighbors, but with the exception of one person who has called the police about the noise multiple times, this was characterized as a feature of apartment life that was to be expected.

Several participants conveyed a discontent that extended beyond these minor issues, and the quality of maintenance was a common thread. Nate is frustrated with the extent of deferred or improperly performed maintenance with the building’s infrastructure, which sometimes manifests as rusty water or flickering lights. He explained that the owner seems to instruct the maintenance team to do only the cheapest and easiest solutions, instead of properly addressing structural issues. Mariana is dismayed by the owner’s lack of effort towards maintaining the aesthetics of the building’s exterior. She recounted a beautiful grove of trees that used to be in front of the building and was cut down several years ago, leaving the building looking barren and subjecting tenants to increased temperatures in their apartments. She also described visible unrepaired facade damage and neglected landscaping that add to the general effect.

Amy, who has a very contentious relationship history with her landlord, segued from the material aspects to the underlying issue of the relationship itself. Her final point about the quality of the work echoes Nate’s frustrations:

“[What would you change?] Yeah everything...carpets need to be replaced, needs to be repainted, all of those things. And it becomes how hard do I fight?...Because I'm busy...There was a flood upstairs, it ruined

my walls...It took my landlord over a month of having his things in my apartment to do this work, that would have taken anyone else a day. And he still did not do a very good job.”

Amy, Nate and Mariana’s frustrations reflect a deeper issue: the landlord’s business model, and lack of responsiveness and professionalism. This will be explored in depth in the next chapter.

Social environment

Participants discussed neighbors in their building at several points in the interview, and they are an important component of the residential experience. The most frequently applied codes were *friendly/considerate* (20 participants), *longevity of tenure* (20), *exchange favors* (17), and *transience in tenancies* (15). More participants are friendly with their neighbors than actually friends with them. This more casual relationship is valued for its low maintenance but supportive nature. For example, Luis appreciates being able to engage in pleasantries with his neighbors and work together to solve issues with the landlord, without the social obligations that a more substantial relationship might entail.

Exchanging favors with neighbors is one of the main components of ‘neighboring’ behavior, which is a foundational element of sense of community (Ross, Talmage & Searle, 2020). Not surprisingly, mentions of favors often coincided with descriptions of a friendly or considerate rapport. Favors include caring for pets and plants, bringing mail inside, helping change lightbulbs and other small maintenance tasks, rides to the grocery store, tending to landscaping and sharing food. Several participants said they do not regularly exchange favors with neighbors, but knowing that one or more

of them would be *willing* to do so if necessary, gives them a sense of security. For Selena, this feeling is intertwined with feelings of stability and being ‘at home’:

“I just feel stable in this apartment, I feel secure. I know my neighbors and they know me. So, if anything bad happens they'll help me. Which I don't think anything will, but you know...”

Not surprisingly, given that 25% of residents in Santa Monica’s rent-controlled housing have resided in their apartments since before January 1999 (Santa Monica Rent Control Board, 2020), longevity of tenure was a common attribute mentioned when describing neighbors in the building. Several participants described how minimal residential turn-over and the presence of long-term residents creates a positive effect of stability, trust and community within the building. Additionally, residential stability in the building is part of what makes their apartment feel like home for some participants. This is an important element for Sharon, who has lived in her home for over 30 years:

“Up until recently, the other tenants in the building had been pretty static in terms of turnover. And so I have great neighbors...It's changing a little bit...it was very much a feeling of a community in our building. Like everybody would always be there to help you out or you know just or like if there had been any kind of like disaster there's no question that we would all be like ‘okay, what do we do, we got to turn off the gas’. It would have definitely been a communal response.”

Though Joyce has lived at her apartment for considerably less time at 14 years, longevity and shared norms about how to coexist in a dense environment are also part of what makes her residence feel like home: “A lot of the people once they move here...Because it's such a great location, they won't leave. So part of it is the same people have been living here forever, and they don't want to move. So that's why - it's your neighbors.”

In addition to participants who described the presence of longtime residents as a positive aspect of the home environment, many others included it as a neutral descriptive detail. No one had a negative opinion of long-term tenancies. Conversely, the majority of participants who mentioned a high level of turnover offered some kind of critique or concern about the phenomenon and its root causes. The role of market forces will be explored in detail in the following chapter.

Caretaking the home

The *renovations and improvements* code was applied when the participants made a cosmetic intervention that either included a stylistic choice or increased the quality of the item, resulting in personalization of the home. Ten participants have made renovations or improvements to their homes at some point in their tenancies. These ranged from minor modifications - like painting one wall blue with a stripe of green - to extensive remodeling throughout the residence. Again, flooring replacement was the most common type of improvement (8 participants). Replacing bathroom and kitchen fixtures and finishes like sinks, faucets and floors was another common upgrade (6), followed by decorative painting (4) and constructing a deck, porch or patio (3).

Sometimes the work was done without asking the landlord for permission. When Gina's sink needed to be replaced, she was unhappy with the proposed replacement and paid several hundred dollars for a sink that was more to her liking. She made this arrangement with the maintenance worker, and still does not know if the landlord is aware this has taken place. She explained that it was worth investing the money, because she has "never had plans to leave." Vanessa has remodeled many features of her

apartment by herself over the past four decades without seeking approval. She attributes this freedom to the manager's relatively laissez-faire approach, combined with a desire to remain "under the radar" due to their history of conflict:

"I ripped up the carpets and finished my floor and concrete and did plaster walls, and updated cupboards. I updated my bathrooms, I changed the sinks, I put in new shower stalls, took out the old disgusting ones...put in a washer dryer - I actually rewired it for a washer dryer in the closet. I mean they used my apartment to see what could be done [with the other apartments] when I updated it."

A few participants have been able to share the costs of maintenance with landlords, and in the process, upgrade items to their specifications. Rena and her husband prefer environmentally friendly paint, so their landlord pays for a cheaper product and they pay the difference in cost. Dave has made extensive modifications to his home over the past 20 years, including removing the ceiling in the living room, adding wood paneling to the back room, installing hardwood floors, and constructing a porch. His bungalow had a lot of deferred maintenance when he first moved in, which presented an opportunity to make repairs while also personalizing the space. He was able to work out a deal with the landlord where he would perform the needed work for free and the owner would take the cost of materials off the rent:

"I kind of made a deal with the landlord saying like, I like this place, I could really fix it up. Like I have the technical skills to improve upon it, because it was in bad shape. So that led me to getting it and then also you know they were very upfront about any work you put into it will pay for your supplies, you can take it off the rent, and that made it that made it a comfortable transition."

For others, given the combination of constrained mobility within Santa Monica and their ability to save money due to paying under-market rents (especially for long-term tenants), a willingness to invest in improving the home is pragmatic. This is the case

for participants who never plan to move, as well as those who hope to or are open to it eventually. Despite her ambivalence about her living situation, when Amy inherited some money after a parent passed away she invested it in improvements to her kitchen and bathroom. Sharon replaced the carpeted floor with hardwood flooring in the past, at her own expense. For Amy and Sharon - both long-term tenants - residence in Santa Monica is dependent on retaining their current housing. This incentivizes investments in the home environment beyond what might be expected in a rental dwelling.

6.3 Neighborhood and City

Most participants expressed strong opinions about the city when asked to describe it, to a much greater extent than the neighborhood (see Table 4). The emphasis on city over neighborhood may be because Santa Monica is geographically small at 8.4 square miles. This may create a situation in which residents are not as siloed in their neighborhoods as may be expected in a larger city, and thus Santa Monica is more ‘knowable’ as a cohesive entity. Participants found it relatively easy to discuss the neighborhood, whereas the prompt to describe Santa Monica frequently elicited a reaction of laughter or contemplative silence followed by in-depth discussion. Participants who have grown up in the city or lived there for decades sometimes conveyed the difficulty of describing something so familiar, while newer residents seemed more able to readily respond to the prompt.

Table 4: Opinions about the neighborhood and city (number of participants)

	Positive	Negative
Neighborhood	15	1
City	20	11

Opinions were gleaned from responses to the description prompt, and were overwhelmingly positive on the neighborhood level. *Character and sense of place* (8 code applications), *how people are* (8), and *walkability* (6) were most frequently mentioned. Responses to the subsequent question asking “what could be better” included affordability (both housing and other), improved public transit and mobility, and people being more considerate or “down to earth.” When asked to describe how the neighborhood has changed over the years there were 10 code counts for negative change, two for positive, and 16 that were neutral descriptions. There was no relationship between these answers and length of tenure, though many of the ‘neutral’ descriptions did include mention of gentrification.

At the city level the most frequently mentioned positive qualities were *amenities/location* (20 code applications) and *character/sense of place* (7). Elements of amenities and location were the beach, the climate, bicycle infrastructure, public transit, high-quality public schools, access to natural areas, cultural resources, dining and entertainment, and community resources like Santa Monica College. There was no apparent relationship between length of tenure and appreciation of these features. However, when asked to describe the city, negative opinions were exclusively expressed by long-term residents with tenures over 20 years, while positive opinions were spread across the tenure spectrum. Prevalent negative aspects were *changes* (6 code applications), *loss of character/sense of place* (4), and *socioeconomic characteristics* (4).

Additionally, when asked how the city has changed over the years, negative opinions comprised the majority of responses (41 code applications for negative, 9

neutral, 4 positive), and were expressed by residents with tenures over 20 years, with a few in the 10-20 year range. This suggests a difference in perception and satisfaction that is related to length of residency, which is likely based on what version of the city feels like the 'real' Santa Monica. This phenomenon was present with the neighborhood as well, but to a lesser extent. Discontent with change that threatens place meanings and social fabric is an element of 'place alienation'. Over the course of the interview participants across the tenure spectrum also expressed high levels of concern about city issues like *homelessness* (37 code counts), *housing costs* (28), *over-development* (25), *crowded/traffic* (25) and *safety/property crime* (19), which were often connected to political dynamics within the city. These are also elements of 'place alienation'.

Social Fabric

Sense of community at the neighborhood level

Participants were asked if there is a sense of community in their neighborhood (open-ended question), and 14 responded affirmatively, five reported *some* sense of community, and two described an absence of community. Not surprisingly, longevity of tenure deepened social bonds on the neighborhood scale. Part of what makes Estelle feel at home in her neighborhood is the social knowledge of place she has developed over the nearly four decades she has resided there. Ocean Park is a place where among long-time residents, "most of us like each other, we know each other, and you know - we appreciate each other." Estelle knows the history of who has lived in the buildings around her, and "we have relationships, we have experiences, we have stories...it's more than just my apartment it's my community."

Heather described a similar experience in her 43 years as an Ocean Park resident, citing a recent study that scored the neighborhood at three times the national average on feelings of trust. She theorized that the elevated level is due to “a lot of us aging hippies who still live around here that I’ve known all the time, and we all help each other out.” Mariana described social ties with her longtime neighbors in the Pico Neighborhood as being “like family.” They have a neighborhood watch program and they “all take care of each other” by being mindful of people who look potentially suspicious and are loitering. Heather, Estelle and Mariana’s descriptions of their neighborhoods’ social character aligns with what Capek and Gilderbloom (1992) depicted in their seminal case study on Santa Monica, which emphasizes the tight knit social fabric of the Ocean Park and Pico Neighborhoods.

For other participants, casual familiarity with people in the neighborhood - both residents and business employees - is an integral component of a sense of community. Selena described how the staff at her two local grocery stores know her because she has been a customer for years. Joyce characterized sense of community in Wilmont as a “villagy” atmosphere, where she is able to walk around the neighborhood to various businesses, walk her dog, and see the same people every day. This familiarity has cultivated feelings of solidarity: “I know who lives where and stuff like that. And even the shop owners...you know, when you see people every day, even though you’re not tight with them, if there was a problem you would instinctively help.” Mariana described a similar experience of forming relationships of familiarity with people who live or work in the vicinity of her home through repeated interactions:

“...there are people who live within a certain radius who I see frequently. And even though I may not know them by name, there is a friendly, like, sense that they know who I am, where I live, I know who they are. I know where they live. We kind of have this feeling of watch out for each other. We're always cordial and polite and say hello.”

Nate described how chance encounters in the neighborhood with other parents and children from the school his son attends have created a sense of community. He compares this with his experience living in Burbank, where “you never bump into somebody else [you] know.” He attributes rent control with creating housing stability for his family, especially during the financial uncertainties of both the pandemic and freelancing. This stability has in turn given them a sense of community and belonging through these repeated encounters and activities:

“I didn't really feel it until we had our son - but when we go out for walks, we go to the park, go to the store, we bump into people that we know, and I think that's really what makes it to me - has made it really feel like community...I feel like it happens quite a bit here where we'll be at the playground and somebody we hadn't intended to have a playdate with, we'd bump into them and then the kids play together and talk to the parents. Go into the store driving down the street and yeah, I've seen somebody I know and just waved. Like that kind of familiarity is really what makes it to me feel like a community.”

Sense of community at the city level

It was difficult at times for participants to differentiate between sense of community on the city and neighborhood scales. When discussing one scale there was often a drift into the other. Overall, 18 participants experience a sense of community, two experience *some* sense of community, and five felt that there was no sense of community at the city level. Four of these latter five *do* feel a sense of community in their neighborhood but explained that the city was too socially fragmented to feel like part of a

community on a larger scale. Gina attributed a lack of community to the influx of people in their early 30s who are single (and presumably childless), have high-paying jobs, and are moving to the city but do not actually care about it. To the first point, three participants noted that they would probably have a very different experience of community if they had children, and the importance of children in forming community bonds is underscored by Nate's quote above.

Two themes emerged in how sense of community is experienced at the city level. Seven participants mentioned how social media platforms like Facebook and Next Door have facilitated community-building through mutual support, especially during the early days of the pandemic. For some, interactions on those sites have been their main source of city-wide community, both before and during the pandemic. The Facebook groups *Ask, Borrow, Give* and *Buy Nothing*, in particular, were mentioned as virtual spaces where community is experienced. Katya identified positive and negative aspects of these platforms for community discourse: While there is a level of volatility in some social media interactions, she has also seen "a lot of folks really come together to help provide support for people who really need it." On the *Ask, Borrow, Give* Facebook page, group members can share unwanted items with other members, or request items that they are in need of. She described how on two occasions, someone was simply having a bad day and asked if there was anyone they could talk to. In response, "60 people were like, you can talk to me just DM me, here's my phone number...I'm almost crying because it's really beautiful to see a community that may not always agree with each other kind of come together to support everyone, no matter what."

Amy shared a similar experience with her local *Buy Nothing* Facebook group, which is her primary community space. In the course of her engagement with the group, she has seen how members “kind of rally around like if someone’s sick, drop off food, and some people - there’s definitely some people who are ill that need help and put it out there and people step right up.” Participation in the group has acquainted her with people she would not have otherwise known, which has been “really lovely.” Karli described these Facebook groups as a positive asset for the community as a whole. The interactions she observes give her “that sense of community where like, people are there for each other if you need them to be.” For Georgia, *Ask, Borrow, Give* is her main source of community aside from her friends. Sarah described *Ask, Borrow, Give* as a space where “everybody is so friendly, and so nice, and so thoughtful and just so giving...you can tell this is like a tight-knit community group.” In this sense, networks of mutual reliance that may have formed through other means before the advent of social media platforms have found a home there.

A culture of civic engagement is another way that some participants experience a sense of community in Santa Monica. For those who already have a high level of civic engagement, participation in various nonprofit, grassroots and city groups is an opportunity to be in community with other Santa Monicans. Vanessa does not feel like a part of her neighborhood community due to a perceived pervasiveness of the NIMBY ideology. She feels, instead, a sense of community with the city staff and activists she interacts with in the course of her work to improve the city’s multimodal and sustainability initiatives. Rena, another highly active long-time resident, described similar experiences: “Even if we don’t agree about political issues, people are at the [various

city] meetings.” While he does not participate in any place-based groups or community forums, Luis agreed that there is a sense of community city-wide and connected it to civic engagement. Conversely, he does not experience a sense of community in his Wilmont neighborhood.

Selena shared a more tangible example of civic engagement, remembering how Santa Monicans came together spontaneously after the May 31st looting to clean up the streets:

“...after the George Floyd murder there was some, you know vandalism in the city of Santa Monica and the next day, I was out there about I don't know 11 o'clock or something, and the streets were filled with people. I mean, I had my broom and my dustpan. People had within a couple of hours, they had cleaned it up, cleaned up the Santa Monica place, cleaned up all the glass. Just, the community did that - it wasn't the city, it was the community...”

Nearly one third of participants perceived a deepening sense of community during the pandemic. An increase in mutual aid networks - where community members offer support in a peer-to-peer model - mirrored a nationwide phenomenon (Solnit, 2020). Heather described how her sense of community increased during the pandemic through hearing about various mutual aid networks, along with “the awareness that you need the people around you.” Katya has “seen a lot of folks really come together to provide support for people who need it” on her local *Ask, Borrow, Give* Facebook group. Heather and Diane have seen this behavior on Next Door, with some of the neighborhood’s younger residents offering to grocery shop for older residents. Ramona explained that “a lot of people, they go out of their way to check in on those who are homebound and they take them food.”

Some participants also developed closer or new relationships with their neighbors. Residents of Bonnie's building started a text chain where neighbors could let the group know when they were going to the store and ask if anyone needed anything. Dave and his neighbor started playing basketball in the street with a portable hoop after the city temporarily closed the basketball courts. They have met new people nearly every day they play. Selena and her neighbors have become closer since the pandemic began. To illustrate this she recalled an occasion where the building's residents came together to celebrate a child's birthday:

“Within the first two months of the pandemic, there was a little girl in our [building], she was two years old, and she had moved in about a month...or two before. And it was going to be her birthday. And we didn't really know the parents, but the landlord sent around a little notice to all of us - it's a small building only 10 units - do we want to meet in the courtyard at five o'clock to celebrate her birthday? And so, at five o'clock on that particular day we all went outside and that little girl walked out to the balloons and a little party. Perfect, it was really wonderful.”

Character and sense of place

Socioeconomic and sociocultural character at the neighborhood level

Descriptions of neighborhood character and sense of place were composed of an array of elements, including the natural environment, geographical location, historical narratives, the built environment, and the social climate. Not surprisingly, sense of place differed across neighborhoods. In the Pico Neighborhood the social element is of particular importance. It is known for its strong sense of community, racial and ethnic diversity, and affordability. Mariana, Christina, Raquel and Ricky are all Latinx, and share similar perceptions of the neighborhood. For Mariana, who has lived in the neighborhood for her entire life, the general longevity of residency has created a social

fabric that is tangible when she is out in the community. She attributes that stability in part to rent control:

“There's still a lot of people that live there that have lived there almost as long as I have. And I don't know other neighborhoods like that. It's not the only rent control building in our little neighborhood. So I think that's another reason why many people are still there that have been there since I was a kid. So it's kind of like plus, you know, you because we are very community oriented...there are people who live within a certain radius who I see frequently. And even though I may not know them by name, there is a friendly, like, sense that they know who I am, where I live, I know who they are. I know where they live. We kind of have this feeling of watching out for each other. We're always cordial and polite and say hello. And, you know, sometimes we stop and have a little chit chat.”

Ramona also grew up in the neighborhood. She describes its residents as low-income and living “day by day” financially, as well as being generally “loving” and “nurturing.” For Ricky, also a Santa Monica native, it is “probably the most interesting part” of the city, with “the most character of any part of the city in terms of diversity and people coming and going.” He illustrates this characterization by pointing out that it is the only place in Santa Monica where one can find a vendor who sells elote, a classic Mexican street food. The neighborhood is known as the heart of Santa Monica’s Latinx community, and Ricky also referenced the urban renewal that shaped the neighborhood in the late 1960s, by placing the 10 freeway through what was at the time the city’s Black community.

Neighborhood change was a common theme among residents of the Pico Neighborhood. Raquel, who grew up in the neighborhood and has lived in her home for nearly three decades, described its shift from a working-class neighborhood shared by Black, Latino, Asian and white households to its current incarnation, as a gentrified space with white families and young professionals moving in. She observed a trend of these

families who are “maybe young couples just out of college...buying the cheaper homes” and renovating them. This demographic shift has catalyzed the transformation of the neighborhood’s small business landscape, with Latinx specialty stores, drug stores and little markets closing. Amy - who is white and does not have the same attachment to the neighborhood’s social character - also noted the changing nature of the commercial strips, where “fancy” restaurants have recently emerged. As a result of these social changes, Christina describes the neighborhood as a “divided community,” where the “Black and brown” residents feel united, while newer residents passing through the park sometimes regard them with nervous looks.

Patrick, who moved to the neighborhood four decades ago and is white, offered a counterpoint. He recalled how it was “not the most sought-after part of town to live in” at the time and would have been considered “the other side of the tracks.” Since then it has gentrified and crime has decreased, but it has remained a diverse neighborhood where people are “cordial - everybody gets along or maybe you know, looks out for each other and you know, respectful.” Ricky also pointed out some positive aspects of neighborhood change, and how the City has taken initiative to preserve the social fabric that is so intrinsic to the neighborhood’s sense of place:

“...there's been more city investments. You know the park didn't used to have a library. The affordable housing that I'm talking about across the street from me used to be a row of abandoned homes and condemned homes that - it actually used to be a lot of gang activity there, and a lot of... there was just a lack of investment in this part of the city in the past. I think it's gotten better in that the city has made concerted efforts to be wary of displacement.”

In the Wilmont neighborhood, several participants identified the social element as a negative aspect of neighborhood character. The name ‘Wilmont’ is a portmanteau of

Wilshire and Montana, which are two major thoroughfares that run west to east through the city. Wilshire Boulevard stretches roughly 16 miles to downtown Los Angeles, while Montana Avenue terminates shortly after the city's border. Wilshire Boulevard is a major commercial strip that is home to car dealerships, drug and grocery stores, and other businesses that serve a wide clientele. Montana Avenue has a distinctively different feel. It is a narrow street with smaller buildings, and higher-end restaurants and boutiques. It bifurcates the neighborhood into the southern section, which contains a high percentage of multifamily housing, and the northern section, which is almost entirely single-family homes that are valued in the multi-millions of dollars. In this sense Wilmont is an interstitial zone shared by Santa Monica's renter households and its wealthiest residents.

Several participants were cognizant of the different socioeconomic populations that the two streets serve. Daphne recalled feeling uncomfortable in "snobby" Montana Avenue shops, where the staff "eye you up and down." She described the difference between the two parts of the neighborhood:

"...you can just tell when you go south Wilshire it's a little bit more lived in, when you go north of Wilshire it's more manicured lawns. People have more of an attitude....And I've definitely noticed there's been a change over the years. The people that I've known since I moved in here are all very down to earth, but I've noticed over time, the people that have moved into the area are very entitled."

Luis grew up in Venice and Santa Monica and has lived in Wilmont for about 15 years. He described the neighborhood as "posh suburban" and very "bougie," with a lot of "soccer moms" picking up their kids in expensive cars. While he enjoys some of the amenities on Montana and the walkability of the neighborhood, he would like to see people be "a little bit less uptight" and more "down to earth."

The Santa Monica imaginary

The city amenities participants listed were often components of a more holistic conceptualization of the city's identity and how it feels to live there. Participants frequently used "beach" as a descriptor before "city" or "town," indicating the role of the geographical location in shaping Santa Monica's character. Two participants - both of whom moved to Santa Monica in the past five years but are decades apart in age - described it as a "friendly beach city." Terms like "laid back" or "casual" were also common, though several people who used that language also said it was changing. Vanessa appreciates the feeling of being a small town in a large urban environment, with proximity to a wide range of natural areas. Karli echoed this sentiment, stating that "there's everything that you would want from a city," with the added advantage of being close to the beach and hiking areas. Selena painted a picture by evoking the city's built environment, natural features and atmosphere:

"The beach, the weather, the air, the palm trees. The pier, you know, even though we can't go there because it's so crowded. But just seeing the pier, driving down pch and seeing the pier lit up you know the ferris wheel lit up...I like the beach atmosphere, you know? Everyone's very casual and that's really what I like."

In contrast to this urban imaginary of the "laid back beach town," several participants mentioned the affluence of the city's residents and the cost of things in general, as well as the city's identity as an international tourist destination. Nate explained:

"It kind of feels kind of like a theme park...it feels like sometimes there's two halves of Santa Monica. There's Santa Monica on like a morning with the marine layer before like nine o'clock when I go down to the beach and run or surf or ride my bike. And then it still feels like a small town."

The orientation toward attracting and sustaining tourism can sometimes clash with the Santa Monica that residents appreciate. He contrasted this peaceful vignette with a statistic he heard that estimates the population expands from about 90,000 to 900,000 during the day, with tourists and workers from other parts of the Los Angeles area. While that is not ideal in some ways because “it does feel like you’re living in someone else’s vacation destination,” he also understands that the tax revenue from these visitors is what facilitates “all the things that make it great to live in Santa Monica,” such as city resources that are considered superior to those of neighboring jurisdictions. This duality is a common thread in descriptions of the city. Katya evoked Santa Monica’s poetic motto to describe its identity, which she characterized by the tension between its idyllic natural setting and climate and the inaccessibility of obtaining affordable housing:

“Santa Monica’s motto is the most accurate motto for a city I have ever heard. It is ‘fortunate people in a fortunate land’...It is a place where you can go to the beach and breathe in the amazing ocean air. It's not too hot, it's not too cold, it's the Goldilocks of cities. Or it would be if it had enough housing.”

Sociocultural and socioeconomic character at the city level

The social dimension of the city is a significant component of many participants’ feelings and opinions. Surprisingly, given the demographics as compared to neighboring Los Angeles, a number of participants described Santa Monica as “diverse.” The majority of these participants identify as Latinx or mixed-race. The only person who described it as “very white” moved to the city recently from Washington D.C., and thus would likely have a different perspective on racial and ethnic diversity. Several participants described the city as economically diverse as well, including longtime resident Rena, who attributed

the continuing tenure of artists and seniors to rent control. Dave, an artist and art instructor, described reactions of surprise when he tells people in other parts of Los Angeles that he lives in Santa Monica, based on their assumption that it is an expensive city where only the wealthy can afford to live.

The dichotomy between liberal/conservative, wealthy/working-class, and renter/homeowner was the most common observation about the sociocultural and socioeconomic character of contemporary Santa Monica. These divisions have been observed on online forums and in neighborhood associations and City Council meetings, as well as in the changing character of the city's commercial areas. Sharon described conflicting priorities between renters and homeowners, with the latter exhibiting a sense of entitlement and a "conservative bent":

"I think it's also quite segregated in some ways. I don't mean racially segregated although that's probably part of it. But there are, you know - there's a lot of conflict between what renters want and what homeowners want in the town or where they think the priorities lie. I mean listen to any City Council meeting which I used to do a lot. You know there're just a lot of conflicting priorities in the town."

Next Door, in particular, seems to provide a platform for a certain type of discourse. Sharon joined the site after the looting of May 31, 2020, and left soon thereafter. She was surprised and upset by the "level of regressive thought that occupied this town," and decided she was "just really horrified" and did not want to participate in discussions on the site. Selena also observed this behavior on Next Door, with a lot of complaining about rent control and people experiencing homelessness. In general, she is judicious about mentioning her status as a longtime resident of a rent controlled home, explaining that "you could just feel that chill and that anger coming from some people,

because they tend to be wealthier people who own property.” At the same time, she echoed Dave’s observation that people sometimes assume she is wealthy because of where she lives.

Katya has also observed “toxicity” in some of the conversations online, though she acknowledges this is also a wider issue with social media and our current national climate of division. She has a high level of civic engagement and participation and has observed the “north side-versus-south side” dynamic described in the previous section that touched on the social significance of Montana Avenue. She characterizes this divide as existing between residents of single-family homes and residents of multifamily housing, including condominium owners. Daphne experienced this at a Wilmont Neighborhood Association meeting. She quickly realized that when people say Wilmont, “they don’t actually mean my side of the street,” and that meeting attendees seemed to wonder why a renter would be in attendance.

This social divide has discouraged Wilmont resident Nicolas from participating in his neighborhood association. While he did not experience the divisiveness that several other participants identified, he perceives the neighborhood association as serving the interests of wealthy homeowners north of Montana. He described Santa Monica as a whole as a “cross between sort of a lot of liberal ideology and I think now a lot of hardcore conservatives.” He illustrated this assessment with *LA Times* data showing that voters in the Democratic primary voted overwhelmingly for Bernie Sanders and other progressive candidates throughout most of the city, with the notable exception of north of Montana (filled with expensive single-family homes), where Michael Bloomberg carried

the vote. That a centrist Democratic candidate could be described as “conservative” is a testament to Santa Monica’s four decades of strong progressive culture and identity.

Issues at the city level

As mentioned previously, participants had overwhelmingly negative feelings about change at the city level. Sociocultural and socioeconomic changes were a dominant theme, along with a loss of character in the built environment. Though the majority of participants who had the strongest feelings about negative changes are residents with over 20 years of tenure and Santa Monica natives, a few people with tenures in the 10-20-year range share their sentiments.

Gentrification

Socioeconomic and sociocultural changes go hand-in-hand and were often attributed to the city’s recent identity as ‘Silicon Beach’ and the influx of capital that came with it. Nicolas described how the city he originally moved to a little over a decade ago was much more laid back, with more of an artist, film industry, surfer and skater community. Though some of that culture is still intact, the only people who can afford to move to Santa Monica are tech industry workers who seem to have “bottomless pockets.” Some of the participants who grew up in the area have particularly strong feelings about social change. Luis also pointed to tech companies as a driver of cultural change: “You have a lot of like, young, upwardly mobile individuals that are, you know, they’re from all over the country. And I just feel like they’re trying so hard to be cool.” He echoed other participants who grew up in the city and articulated a fundamental shift in sense of place:

“I feel like the Santa Monica I grew up with and the Santa Monica now are almost two different places. Santa Monica always had like a significant amount of wealth, at least on the north side of Santa Monica. But it was really just kind of like a beachy, laid-back, creative, kind of artistic community. A little bit bohemian, a little bit touristy. I don't know, it was unique. And now it just feels kind of overrun with wealth and gentrification. And I think it's lost a lot of its character. But it's definitely still all of those things. So it's definitely still touristy and it has, you know, some eclectic people and creative people and you know, people from like, different walks of life and there is still like, you know, poor neighborhoods in Santa Monica. But it has become more corporate and more gentrified.”

Raquel also grew up in Santa Monica. She is almost two decades older than Luis, yet she shared many of the same observations. Housing costs are the main thing she would change if she could change anything, and she theorized that they are inflated due to the presence of the tech industry. When asked how she would describe Santa Monica she emphatically replied, “snobby, because it's not the Santa Monica that I grew up in. So it's changed I don't know, probably because of you know, the tech companies that have sort of settled so you've got...all the techie people.” Christina grew up in adjacent parts of West Los Angeles but had spent time in Santa Monica throughout her life. She also pointed to the role of capital in corrosively changing the city's culture. She described how Santa Monica went from being a friendly place with a laid-back surfer vibe to being a place where “now you got to drive a Maserati and, you know, be able to, you know, shop at the high end, you know restaurants and it's just, it's different. It's more a Beverly Hills vibe.”

Tourism

The tension between tourism as an economic development strategy and the impact that it can have on the city's sense of place was prevalent in negative sentiments about

the city, and in particular, descriptions of change at the city level. Though two participants noted that the revenue from tourist taxes is what enables Santa Monica to have city resources (e.g., schools, parks) that are superior to neighboring Los Angeles, a greater number of participants felt that the city's tourist orientation is an existential threat to its identity and livability. Estelle has lived in her home for nearly four decades and has become disillusioned with the city for several reasons. She cited evidence of how "the community culture has been changed dramatically...by the so-called economic development plans of the city," tracing the beginning of this plan back to the late 1980s or early 1990s, where the "so-called planning department" began to "convert Santa Monica into a regional shopping destination and an international tourist destination."

Several participants connected tourism with a loss of character and a host of other problems, including an increase in traffic and general crowding, as well as demolition of beloved 'third spaces' like diners. The extension of the Metro E Line light rail into downtown Santa Monica was also perceived as playing a role in this issue. Claire described how tourists from other parts of Los Angeles come in on the weekends and "trash the place." Mariana attributes the loss of the 24-hour Norm's and Denny's diners, and a certain era of Santa Monica in general, to the Metro. Both restaurants were demolished to build large transit-oriented housing developments:

"Before the Metro existed...there were some parts of Santa Monica that still felt very, you know, we had the Norm's, and we had the Denny's and we had these, like old school, like places that were very kind of classic Santa Monica. And when they put in that Metro, they took out a lot of things."

Patrick expanded on this perception that planning and development in Santa Monica is oriented toward "outsiders" at residents' expense:

“When I first moved in here we had businesses that catered to the local people, you know mom and pop things...things that were local that were owned you know by people in the neighborhood and catered to people in the neighborhood. And Santa Monica has totally gotten rid of that. The government, they've gone for the tourist industry...Everything has been catered toward outsiders, and they don't really care about their citizens that much anymore. They really don't and that has been very, very bad for Santa Monica.”

Daphne shared a similar sentiment, explaining that “it used to be a sleepy little beachside town, which was what attracted me to it, many years ago. It was funky, it was quaint.”

Now it is “too tourist,” with too many cars and large-scale developments. She describes the memory of what Santa Monica used to be like through a vignette of going out to eat at an all-night diner with friends after a night on the town:

“The places that we all used to go to at one o'clock in the morning for something to eat aren't there. They've all gone, they've been pulled down and an apartment building is being put in its place. It's lost so much of its character and...when I go down to Santa Monica I think 'oh my God I don't even recognize it'.”

Many participants also expressed a negative opinion of downtown Santa Monica, and the Third Street Promenade and Santa Monica Place shopping mall in particular. The Promenade - a three block open-air shopping center - was redeveloped in the late 1980s and quickly gained popularity with Santa Monica residents before eventually becoming one of the top tourist destinations in Southern California. The main reasons cited were the increasing presence of houseless people and crime (which some connected with the advent of the pandemic), as well as the fact that the Promenade contains almost exclusively chain stores, whereas it used to be filled with small businesses like bookstores and vintage clothing shops. Raquel has felt uncomfortable at the Promenade

in the recent past because of its upscale character, and Sharon avoids it as a policy.²⁴

Santa Monica Place (adjacent to the Promenade) is similarly perceived as being oriented towards tourists. Mariana complained that when the mall was renovated recently, stores like Tiffany's completely changed its character:

“...there are places like that, that I no longer go to. Because it's not for me. It's for everyone else who comes to Santa Monica. You know what I mean? Like, all of those changes aren't for the locals. Like the locals didn't want any of that...If we wanted to go shop Louis Vuitton we would have gladly gone to Beverly Hills.”

City government and political dynamics

Distrust of City government, elected officials and their priorities is a major theme in the ‘place alienation’ some participants experience. This distrust stems from issues like over-development, the aforementioned touristification, the City’s response to the May 31st riots, and the response to the homelessness crisis. The common theme in discussion of the city’s political atmosphere was the observation of dysfunction. While some people attributed these problems to city administration or former Councilmembers, other participants expressed distrust of newly elected Councilmembers, who they described as “regressive” NIMBYs. The negative tone of the discourse was also a factor. Christina described an atmosphere of name calling that evokes junior high school dynamics: “I don’t follow politics a ton to begin with, but yeah, it just seems like everybody’s just picking on each other. Nothing’s ever really getting done. Everybody’s just pointing the finger at other people.” Mariana used to regularly attend community

²⁴ Several months after these interviews were conducted City Council adopted a new plan for the Promenade that expands the type of business allowed in an effort to reposition it toward residents.

meetings and summarized the exhaustion and disillusionment many participants seem to feel:

“You can only go to so many meetings where the topics are the same, but the solutions are never different. So at some point, you just kind of like, well, I mean, I know what this meeting is gonna be about - it’s more about, you know, how we can sell properties and make more money and, you know, build certain things that really nobody wants. But we’re gonna do it anyway. So you’re just kind of like, okay, well, I don’t need to go to that one. And then, you know, you just don’t. And then the reality is you just don’t want to make time for it. And I don’t - I’m done.”

The core of many participants’ critique is the perception that various incarnations of City Council over the past two decades have been allied with corporations and developers over the interests of Santa Monicans. And because SMRR candidates have held a majority on Council since the early 1980s, this prioritization of development is interpreted by some as being part of their hidden (or not so hidden) agenda. Diane, a renter in her 80s who had been a longtime SMRR supporter, stopped going to their meetings because “over the years they’ve become more pro-real estate than pro-consumer.” She expressed hope that the new Council would bring change. Heather agrees with Diane, stating that the City is “giving away the store to developers.” Daphne explained that the three SMRR-backed incumbents who were voted out lost their seats because they were only interested in “lining their coffers over development.” Similarly, Nicholas speculated that people voted the three incumbents out because they had had enough of corporations going “ramshod over the city.” Conversely, Ricky embraces the YIMBY ethos and feels that SMRR politicians are opposed to density at the levels needed to truly address rental affordability. These two perspectives - combined with the

participants who have positive impressions of SMRR leaders - are a microcosm of political discourse in the city.

Community engagement and participation

While a sense of community and/or place attachment do not *predict* participation in the community, they are generally a precondition of it (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). I have already touched on some participants' experiences with the Wilmont Neighborhood Association and the perception that their agenda centers the concerns of affluent homeowners. This is not a surprising finding in that neighborhood given the socioeconomic divide, and is also supported by literature on neighborhood associations and their orientation toward homeowner priorities (Goetz & Sidney, 1994). One participant does attend Wilmont Neighborhood Association meetings, but describes them as "a lot of talking" where nothing is accomplished. Several other people participate in their neighborhood associations in the Pico and Ocean Park neighborhoods.

Additionally, participants have engaged in a variety of other community groups and activities that the literature on this topic rarely considers. For example, Christina sets up a "community giving table" once a week in her complex's courtyard where people come to pick up groceries and prepared meals, Gina volunteers with a local rabbit rescue organization, and Nate coaches youth sports. In total, 27 of the study's participants have participated in some kind of civic or volunteer group or activity, and some of them are currently active in a number of groups and other community-based endeavors.

In conclusion, participants overwhelmingly expressed attachment, sense of community, and other sentiments that evidence a strong dwelling relationship with their

home environment. These sometimes exist alongside varying levels of ‘place alienation’ and ‘residential alienation’. These aspects will be discussed in the next chapter along with the impact of factors like tenant protections, the rental and housing market, and the landlord on the residential experience; as well as various coping strategies to manage housing-related stress.

Chapter Seven: Security, Insecurity and The Residential Experience

Though participants experience place attachment and dwelling in their residences and home environments overall, a significant number must also manage elements of residential alienation. Often the stakes are high, as most participants in this study would face imminent displacement from the city if they were to lose their homes. The impact of this displacement would be material, social, and emotional.

This chapter is the second section of the findings. It looks at the role of Group One factors that were explored in Chapters Four and Five – such as the landlord/manager and the rental and real estate market - in creating conditions of residential alienation, including perceptual and de facto security and insecurity. It also identifies some of the coping behaviors that renters adopt in response, as well as the impact of tenant protections on these experiences and perceptions. These findings reveal that loopholes and other sources of precarity sometimes undermine the intended effect of tenant protections. To the extent that participants experience stability due to tenant protections, I explore the relationship between it and behaviors like community participation and caretaking the home, as well as possible selves. These are connected through both perceptual and de facto security of tenure.

7.1 The Role of The Rental and Real Estate Market

Homeownership

Homeownership is a cornerstone of the American Dream and is often considered to be synonymous with full stakeholder or citizen status. Yet home prices in Santa

Monica are some of the highest in the Los Angeles area, and many of Santa Monica's roughly 65,000 renters are faced with the reality that they will never own a home in the city. This market condition plays a fundamental role in the cognitions, behaviors and decisions of renter households. When asked about their aspirations of owning a home at some point in the future, responses fell into three categories with some overlap. 17 participants reported that homeownership is out of reach in their preferred location (Santa Monica or the Los Angeles area) and do not wish to relocate; seven participants hope to eventually own a home somewhere outside of the area or are already looking into it; and five do not want to own a home. Several own or have previously owned property outside the area. No one was hopeful about the prospects of acquiring a home in Santa Monica, West Los Angeles, or inner-Los Angeles.

For many longtime tenants, the window of opportunity to buy a home in Santa Monica closed years ago. Selena reflected, "when I look back I should have bought a couple of condos in my neighborhood because I had those opportunities, but I didn't because I didn't know any better." Amy grew up in a conservative environment and thought it best to wait until marriage to buy a home. Around 1999 she decided to start the process even though she was not married, but she began her search "just as the market took off." At that point it became "too expensive and too overwhelming," and she eventually ended up buying a home out of state several years later as an investment and "plan b" in the event she is eventually displaced from her Santa Monica apartment.

For others, it was never a possibility, due to financial constraints and life circumstances. Sharon had a settlement from her divorce when she first moved back to Santa Monica and was interested in buying a home, but she was unemployed at the time

and the difficulty of getting financing precluded it, even with a down payment. When Raquel inherited some money from her mother, she considered buying a home, but was worried that she would have to make balloon payments and would potentially lose the house to foreclosure on a single income. Lisa's sister had a condominium she was selling when Lisa first arrived in Santa Monica, but she did not have the funds to purchase it. Georgia started her career late and was never able to save enough to keep up with the housing market and purchase a home. For Estelle it was a "moving target," where she never had the combination of enough for the down payment and the ability to get financing.

For younger participants with shorter tenancies, there has never been a time when the housing market in Santa Monica was accessible. Ricky does not have access to the generational wealth that would be necessary, in his analysis, to purchase a home there. Bonnie is a relatively recent arrival to the city. She would love to buy a house with a yard, but "it feels so unattainable anywhere that I don't know if it would actually happen." Based on what she has heard about the market, she doubts she would be able to afford anything within Los Angeles, let alone Santa Monica. Similarly, Gina dreams of buying a small Santa Monica bungalow but knows that she will never own a home as long as she remains in the Los Angeles area. Karli and her partner are interested in exploring the idea of buying a home at some point, but only if it makes more sense financially than renting. She feels like buying in Santa Monica is probably out of reach, and potentially in Los Angeles as well.

A small subset of participants is not interested in owning a home. With the exception of Nicholas, they are all retired. Olivia sold her house out of state after her

husband passed away and rents an apartment in Santa Monica to be close to her daughter and grandchild. She anticipates remaining in her apartment indefinitely. Patrick appreciates not having to worry about maintenance and has never considered being a homeowner. Selena owned a home out of state for a period and it required a lot of upkeep. Between those expenses, the mortgage and the property taxes she questions whether a homeowner actually owns their home. Ultimately, she prefers not to waste money on housing and be “house poor.” Nicholas feels similarly, explaining that the financial burden of ownership can outweigh the benefits. He wonders, “what’s the point of owning, really, if you’re happy with where you’re living in this apartment?” Diane has never been married and has simply never felt that she needed to own her home:

“I just needed an apartment with lots of space. I lived with roommates for a long time and had no problems, and I like renting...most people will say, ‘I want to buy a house, I want to buy a house, it's mine, it's mine’ but I never felt that.”

Constrained Mobility

“Constrained mobility” is a negative outcome that is sometimes attributed to rent control in literature that examines the policy’s impacts (Krol & Svorny, 2005; Diamond, et al. 2019). In the course of the interview one third of participants touched on the lack of housing options in Santa Monica - and for some in the greater LA area - which underscored the importance of retaining their rent-controlled home. This was generally portrayed as a factor that limited their housing options. For some of the long-term tenants, the only option if they were displaced from their home would be to move out of the city, and possibly the county and state. For others, having to find new housing in Santa Monica is a possibility, but their analysis of the cost/benefit relationship does not

favor it. The City's data on rental affordability in Chapter Four underscores these conditions.

Sharon and Amy are both long term tenants in their 50s who do freelance work and rely on their rent-controlled apartments for financial sustainability. Sharon has been living in her home for over three decades and would not be able to afford a market rent in the area. She grew up in Santa Monica, is attached to it, and does not want to move in the near future, but she is open to relocating out of state eventually. Though Amy has a difficult relationship with her landlord/manager, she recognizes that remaining in her apartment is the only way she can continue to live in Santa Monica, which is a worthwhile trade-off. She explained, "there's so many wonderful things that outweigh the negatives, but it's like you have to be diligent."

Gina and Luis have tenures that are shorter - at just over 10 years - and are in their mid-30s and early 40s respectively. Though they are in a different life stage than Sharon and Amy, they are also limited in their ability to move within Santa Monica. Gina, who is considered low-income, cannot afford to pay a market rent in Santa Monica at all. She recalled reading a conversation on social media where someone complaining about noise in their apartment was advised to simply find a more suitable living arrangement. These comments struck her as insensitive to the economic reality of housing constraints for many people in Santa Monica:

"...the number of people that commented 'well if you don't like apartment noise, then you should just move to a house', or like 'if you don't like apartment noise figure out a different, like different situation - like if you live in an apartment you should just be used to that'. So I'm like, where am I supposed to go?!"

Luis is an upwardly mobile professional working in the creative sector. Unlike Gina, Sharon and Amy he might be able to afford a market rent in Santa Monica, but the sacrifice would be impactful. Much more of his income would go towards rent, leaving little funds available for travel and other things he enjoys. “At that point, I would probably reevaluate and think about places throughout the country that I’ve enjoyed visiting or staying and, you know, see if maybe I could live there.” He also would not want to move into an apartment without the tenant protections he currently has, where rent would potentially increase with market conditions. In this sense rent control is “like a double-edged sword. It’s offered a lot of protection, but maybe it’s hindered me from growing or moving into a larger space, because I’m so secure.” Nicolas is similarly situated in terms of finances and life stage. Though he would potentially be able to afford to move within the city he would most likely leave if he lost his current home. He has looked at other apartments and found that the “give and take on the amenities has not been that favorable.” Dave has come to a similar conclusion. He explained, “you know, most people would live somewhere and they would always be looking for maybe an upgrade in their same city. I kind of gave up on an upgrade here or proximity to where I work.”

Participants were also asked about their future housing plans. Eleven people reported that they never want to move out of their current home, 13 plan to stay for at least the foreseeable future, one has to move in the near future for financial reasons, and four indicated that they would like to move eventually. There was some overlap between these, with several participants expressing multiple sentiments, and several others who did not know how to answer.

Diane, who is retired and has lived in her home for over three decades, plans to live in her apartment for the rest of her life. Joyce can also see herself dying in her apartment because “where would I go that would be better?...I’d be hard pressed to find some place where I feel more at home.” Patrick plans on remaining in his home “for the duration,” meaning permanently. While the majority of participants who never want to move are over 60, there were two people in their 40s and 50s who expressed a desire to stay in their apartment as long as possible. Though some have ongoing tension or conflict with their landlord or manager, these participants were mostly satisfied with their living arrangements.

Relationship status and life stage is relevant for participants who indicated that they had a more open plan that accounted for changing life circumstances. Katya is in her early 30s and has been dating her boyfriend for a short time. Were they to move in together, her apartment would not have enough room for both of their things. Though Katya is happy in her home, is attached to it, and feels that it meets her needs, there are two conditions in which she would consider moving:

“I’m not really planning or considering moving out anytime in the near future. Given how good of a deal it is, all things considered, and the space I have for the price in the location...that calculation of the three variables kind of makes me not ever want to move, unless I win the lottery or get married - basically those are the two.”

Karli is a young professional in her early 30s who lives with her partner. She is satisfied with her current home and plans to stay “until we can either upgrade to a better rental or if we can ever afford to buy somewhere in LA.” Nate is also a young professional in a dual-earner household and is open to moving eventually, but would not consider leaving the neighborhood while his young son is in school. He does not

anticipate finding a more favorable living arrangement there in the meantime. He explained that “in some ways it’s been like a blessing and a curse because it’s so much space for the price we pay...we can’t find anywhere with as much space as we have that is, you know, for this value.” Gina is in her mid-30s and would like to stay in her home for as long as possible but is also open to moving if a better opportunity presents itself, such as purchasing a home with friends or a partner.

Trade-offs

In addition to the cost/benefit analyses described above, there were other ‘trade-offs’ that factored into participants’ housing choices. Having cheap rent in Santa Monica was generally considered worth dealing with landlords who do only the bare minimum in maintenance, older housing, and even the inherent instability of renting. Several people described a favorable trade-off with a landlord who has a laissez faire approach to management. While there may be deferred maintenance and minimal repairs, the resident also enjoys autonomy in their home, minimal contact with the landlord or manager, and affordable rent. In contrast with her previous Santa Monica apartment, Daphne’s landlord/manager never enters her home without asking, is rarely seen, and allows her to modify her apartment. This (in addition to below market rent) outweighs the inconvenience of a faulty heater and an outdated kitchen with cabinets that are slightly crooked.

Joyce’s first apartment manager “didn’t care [what the tenants did] as long as he got the money, which is pretty unusual, because there were a lot of rules [at other apartment buildings in the area].” At the same time her apartment had windows that were

falling out of their frames which he refused to replace (in violation of housing code), but it was worth it because “the location is magnificent.” Ricky is also content to live with a manager who is “a little bit of a skinflint” but is also not a “super hands-on person.” This makes him feel like he has autonomy in the space, without the micromanagement that some apartment residents experience.

Dave lives in an older bungalow-style home owned by a landlord who maintains the property at the bare minimum. He described a trade-off between cheap rent and a lack of “modern convenience living in an older house,” such as having “normal heat,” and he also does whatever maintenance he is able to. Christina has a similar understanding and does not mind doing her own maintenance and repairs when she can: “I really think that the biggest trade off is just kind of knowing that there's gonna be issues in your apartment, and you're gonna either take care of them yourself or just have issues.” Raquel also weighed the pros and cons of living in a rent-controlled apartment. While she appreciates that her rent increases by a nominal amount each year, she also understands - possibly because she works for a property management company - that the owner is not going to invest more than what is necessary in the upkeep until a long-term tenant moves out.

Several participants pointed to the benefit in renting versus owning one’s home. Patrick appreciates being able to call the landlord when something major happens, like a pipe break. Joyce understands that her home is not an investment, but feels that it is also less of a “burden” than a home that one owns. On one hand Ricky would “love to put money into turning this into like a weird little condo,” but recognizes the downside is that the building is old and has many issues. In his current tenure as a renter, he can call the

landlord when a drain is clogged or there is another issue, whereas if he owned it, he would be responsible for all those costs. Lisa has had more positive experiences with maintenance and repairs than these participants, and also enjoys not having to worry about these issues.

Market Conditions and Social Fabric

As mentioned in the previous chapter, having neighbors with longer tenures is a desirable feature of the apartment building's social fabric, which is an important component of the residential experience. Participants who mentioned turn-over in their buildings often offered theories or critiques that addressed its root causes. High rents were the top reason cited, with several long-term tenants directly connecting this to the passage of Costa Hawkins and the end of vacancy control in 1999. As one explained, there is little incentive to stay in an apartment long term when you are paying Santa Monica's market rents. Another participant explained that some high-income households rent temporarily while they are searching for a home to purchase. One participant theorized that young people who cannot afford the rents simply move out of Santa Monica, while several others believe that it is *mostly* young professionals who can afford the high market rents.

Participants connected an influx of new tenants with several negative outcomes, including a change in the building's socioeconomic character and an increase in partying behavior and other noise issues. Sometimes these are overlapping:

“...we get a lot of young people with high discretionary income to move in for a year or two or three and then they're gone. So the socio-cultural quality within the community changes...they're either party types or they feel, I would say, entitled because they're paying so much rent.”

“There are three units in the building that have been pretty much in a chronic state of turnover and not to the benefit of the rest of us...they're mostly young. And loud. That's all I can say. I mean that's pretty much been the case in both of those units where it's just sort of like...Okay you're not still in a sorority and there are other people who live here.”

Several participants speculated about landlords' business models and how they intentionally increased transience. Daphne shared a story she had heard about a rent-controlled apartment that had been flipped using cash-for-keys and vacancy decontrol:

“Every tenant was offered a few thousand to move - some did, some didn't. And then there was the bartering going or the negotiating going back and forth. And ultimately, nearly every tenant moved, with the exception, I think it was about four because their prices would be just too much. Their relocation allowance that they wanted was too much. So the new owners came along, they filled in the pool so now they don't have to - there's no upkeep there and they put laminate down in all the units...And the rents went from probably \$1,500 to two up to starting at \$3,000 and up. So you're now seven blocks from the beach and it's a revolving door. It's month to month, you don't have to sign a one-year lease...And people stay six months, they move out, the rent goes up. Somebody else is in for six months, they leave, the rent goes up...”

This business model of a “revolving door” was mentioned by several participants, and is supported by the market language section of Chapter Five, which illustrates how maximizing rents by securing new tenants is in industry norm. Amy, who lives in close proximity to Santa Monica College, reported that her landlord only rents to students, and usually to international students who will not be able to continue to live in the building after their studies conclude. Mariana's landlord's business model has changed over the more than four decades she has lived in the building. For the two units that do not have longer-term residents, the landlord leases each bedroom separately, rather than offering one lease for the entire household. This enables households - which are composed of “college kids” - some flexibility in moving in and out. Frequent turnover also means that

new residents are “sold on” the building’s desirable location without knowing about its deferred maintenance, and do not stay around long enough to take action to remedy it.

Nicolas shared strong views about Santa Monica’s housing market and affordable housing crisis. He values the stability and longevity of the tenancies in his building, and in particular, that he knows who his neighbors are. He connected high market rents and the resulting transience of residency with the inability to form community or a personal connection with the home:

“Nothing can stay long enough to grow. You know, if you look at - if you think about a community is like a plant, if you're constantly repotting the plant and putting a new plant and then you never have a fully blossoming flower because you're constantly pulling it out, and it's constantly just a bud. You never have a plant, just have a pot. And that's what I feel like the city is...”

In conclusion, knowledge of the rental and housing market plays a role in renters’ housing choices, interpretation of landlord behavior, and experiences of community in their buildings. One need only perform a search on Loopnet or another online aggregator of multifamily properties for sale (see Chapter Five) to see the language of eminent displacement deeply embedded in industry practice.

7.2 The role of the landlord or property manager

The relationship with the landlord or manager is one of the primary elements that informs experiences of residential alienation in a rental home (McKee, et al. 2019). As the detailed history of tenant protection policymaking and ever-evolving landlord tactics outlined in Chapter Four illustrates, a cohort of Santa Monica landlords remain determined to exert power and/or maximize financial returns regardless of the impact on their tenants. Additionally, the themes identified in multifamily housing industry culture

in Chapter Five portray a defiant retrenchment of the ideology of private property in the face of policies that seek to improve the quality of life for renters.

Participants described a range of relationships and experiences with their landlords and managers, from close friendship to a strategy of total avoidance whenever possible. Several have pursued private legal action or remedies through the City’s various departments. Some participants shared more than one opinion of their landlord throughout the course of the discussion, as pertains to different aspects or interactions. Code counts for these ‘attitudes’ reveal an intriguing finding (see Table 5). The numbers for *mixed feelings* and *negative sentiment* were similar between landlords and managers with one exception; the number of participants who have a positive impression of their landlord is twice that of those who have positive impressions of the manager. Roughly half the landlords in each category also manage their properties, which may indicate a connection between landlord-managers and positive tenant relationships.

Table 5: Opinions about landlords and property managers

Code	Code applications	Participants
Attitudes: Landlord - Mixed feelings	6	6
Attitudes: Landlord - Negative sentiment	13	9
Attitudes: Landlord - Positive sentiment	28	12
Attitudes: Manager - Mixed feelings	6	6
Attitudes: Manager - Negative sentiment	23	8
Attitudes: Manager - Positive sentiment	8	6

Relationships

Participants who have positive opinions about their landlord and/or manager cited responsiveness to maintenance issues, aesthetic improvements to the property, capital improvements, working with tenants who lost income during the pandemic, flexibility (e.g., having an understanding about the tenant personalizing the space), accessibility, and a friendly demeanor. Sarah repeatedly emphasized how much she appreciates her landlord:

“She's great. We have a really good relationship. She has another tenant on site who is like the manager. But I can reach out to her anytime about anything, small or big. She knows that I'll let her know about anything like around the building. If something is like, not right, if like a cable was hanging loose, I'll let her know. Just because I care about the place. You know? She appreciates that. But she's, she's great. She takes care of things right away. She's helped me out actually, when I shifted my employment during the pandemic. She was very, very helpful and understanding.”

Similarly, Selena has become close to her landlords, who are the second-generation owner/managers and live on-site. She expressed gratitude that the owner has permitted her to make so many creative choices in renovating and personalizing her apartment. She calls it the “magic building.” Though the owners are very responsive to maintenance requests, Selena is also happy to pitch in when possible. She explained, “I've been here a long time and I'm very handy so I fix a lot and plus I help whenever I can around the building, I feel you know...It's just part of saying thank you. For just being wonderful.”

Tenants who had a negative impression of their landlord most commonly described feeling that the landlord does not really care about the building or its tenants, and/or that they are not appropriately responsive to maintenance issues. Ramona grew up

in Santa Monica and has lived in the city for her entire life, during which time she has lived in a number of rent-controlled homes. The home her family rented prior to her current residence had a hole in the floor, which the landlord only repaired after she escalated the situation by sending a formal demand letter. She explained that in general, “the owners of the property that [are] under rent control, they really don’t care about the tenants at all.” The feeling that the landlord of a rent-controlled home will only fix a serious problem like a hole in the floor after repeated requests creates a stressful relationship and unsafe living conditions - both of which are conditions of residential alienation.

Several participants have had more than one landlord at the same home over the years and compared living conditions under their different regimes. Estelle has lived in her apartment for almost four decades and had a generally positive experience with management until a new owner took over the property some years ago. In addition to covering decorative exterior painting that gave the building character and dramatically pruning a rose bush she had planted, the social atmosphere also became constrained by what she described as “martial law.” Estelle is the one participant who indicated that she does not feel at home at all. Patrick is another longtime tenant who has had a range of experiences with his four landlords over the years. He lives in a small complex and the landlords have also been the property managers. Whereas his original landlord was described in effusive terms as a laid-back person who charged under-market rents, the current landlord is always looking for reasons to end Patrick’s tenancy:

“...the other guy you could talk to, and you know, have a conversation with. This guy is just you know.... I don't really interact with him that

much to be honest with you. The less I have to deal with him the better off I am. It just ends up in a shouting match...”

Several participants described these types of issues with landlords that have difficult personalities or unethical business practices. Amy’s experience with her longtime landlord/manager involves a dysfunctional pattern of deferred and incorrectly performed maintenance, harassment, verbal threats, attempted wrongful eviction, illegally taking away her parking spot, and lying to city officials. She recounted a lengthy saga where the owner tried to evict her neighbor, Jim - the only other long-term tenant in the building - through various tactics. After she became involved the City Attorney’s office opened a harassment complaint, and the owner was ordered to pay fees for violating the harassment ordinance. She has also seen the owners use tactics like posting a termination notice on a tenant’s door, photographing it for documentation, and then removing it immediately so they are not aware of it and thus not able to respond. Amy’s strategy is to meticulously document every single interaction and be “on guard” for both herself and her neighbor, but these experiences have left her exhausted and ambivalent about feeling at home in her apartment.

Negative impressions of some of the property managers who are not landlords involved similar issues of unresponsiveness and incompetence. Raquel’s building was recently sold, and she has experienced some difficulty in getting the management to respond to maintenance requests. When her toilet had a major leak, she called the management office and was asked to take photos of it, though she explained that it was an emergency that required immediate attention from a professional. She had to wait until the next day for a maintenance worker to reposition the toilet, and then the incident

occurred twice more, with water running down the hallway the second time until maintenance came out to respond. Finally on the fourth occasion she paid a friend \$180 to fix it, and the problem has not recurred since then.

Self-advocacy can sometimes result in being treated differently than other residents. In Luis' case an initial exchange with his manager at the beginning of the relationship strained the dynamic permanently. In addition to issues of general incompetence, Luis has also experienced "an attitude" from the manager whenever he reports that maintenance is needed. He described calling the manager about a faulty water heater and being asked "why is it always you? What are you always reporting it?" though he had previously confirmed with other neighbors that they had also reported the issue.

Luis and Raquel's issues are minor compared to four longtime tenants who detailed lengthy and turbulent histories with their property managers. Heather described her building manager as a "piece of work," and the most challenging to deal with out of a series of managers over her 43 years of residency. She has friends who are seniors and live in other buildings he manages who "have PTSD" from their experiences with him. Vanessa has a similar opinion of her longtime property manager, and also described him as a "piece of work." His problematic behavior began when the building was converted to condominiums under TORCA, and he successfully pressured most of the tenants to move out rather than exercise their right to continue renting. Over the years since he has perpetrated a number of conflicts with her. Fortunately, the Home Owners' Association has tempered his antics, but "I just never know when he's gonna pull something else," she explained, and then "with a sweep of the hand I feel like I have no voice."

Maintenance and Repairs

Half of study participants have paid for and/or performed maintenance and repair tasks in their homes. Two participants explained that in a rent-controlled apartment, it is understood that tenants are responsible for their own basic maintenance. Daphne and Diane have both lived in their homes for several decades. During this time Daphne has re-painted on multiple occasions, re-surfaced the kitchen floor, and is considering paying for the porcelain bathtub to be resurfaced. She explained, “having been here for so long after a while things start to look a bit tatty, and so I do need to do my kitchen floor again because...the linoleum is beginning to peel up.” Diane agrees that it is just part of apartment life in a rent-controlled Santa Monica home: “Oh yeah, for the rent control apartments you have to do it yourself. So maybe every 10 years I've recarpeted and repainted the walls.”

Participants reported either paying for or performing painting and floor covering replacement more than any other maintenance task. Raquel used one of her COVID stimulus checks to replace a 15-year-old carpet due to ongoing sinus infections. Neither state nor local law includes a ‘life expectancy’ metric for paint or floor coverings, which would specify the point at which the landlord would be expected to replace them. However, the Rent Control Charter stipulates that the rental home be maintained in habitable condition and offers tenants the option of filing a decrease petition for flooring if it is “damaged or missing,” and for paint if it is “damaged” (Santa Monica Rent Control Board, n.d.). Since these descriptions are subject to interpretation - and because “damage” may not describe a carpet that is 15 years old - it is not surprising that many tenants choose to perform this maintenance themselves. Additionally, the process of

sending the landlord a demand letter and then filing a petition if they do not respond favorably comes with the possibility of straining the relationship.

Almost two-thirds of participants experience deferred maintenance on some level. There were 17 code applications from 13 participants for buildings where essential maintenance/repairs were *always done on time* (which does not preclude larger structural work or non-essential maintenance/repairs being deferred); 12 code applications from 10 participants for maintenance *that was not timely*; and 23 code applications from 9 participants for maintenance that may or may not be done promptly, but that was *not done correctly*. Several participants reported doing what maintenance they could to avoid the potential hassle and delay when submitting a request to the owner or manager. Others consider themselves to be “handy,” and find it easier or reasonable to do what they can themselves. Fear of straining the relationship with the landlord or manager was also a theme and will be explored in a later section.

Often issues of timeliness and quality are combined, with tenants asking repeatedly for a problem to be addressed only to receive the most cursory solution. That there is a significantly higher ratio of code applications to participants for maintenance that was not done correctly suggests the especially distressing nature of the situation, especially when one must advocate repeatedly for action to be taken. Mariana has lived in her home for over four decades and the building has been owned by the same person for as far back as she can remember. She described the difficulty of getting repairs addressed, and how when repairs *are* made, the work is a “band-aid solution” that does not address the root cause of the issue:

“Unless the city comes down and says you have to do something, they won't do it. And then the other part is that when you request work - because they do come in and repair things in your building, like water damage, or leaks or stuff like that, which is great - But it's still, like, you'll make a request, and sometimes it takes a few days to respond or to come into your place or to let you know that they're coming. And even the work that they do in that regard, is like, like I could have done that. Like there's no exploring as to the cause of a problem. It's just literally let's, you know, put a band-aid over it and call it a day.”

Claire's landlord is similarly unresponsive and also addresses substantial issues with subpar methods:

“He's non-existent. if you call him for something forget it, you know. The bathroom - the guys next door, their toilet leaked and it made a hole into the laundry room below. And he finally had somebody come and fix it but there's a big hole there, and you know, every time the guys in number seven - three guys in number seven- walk, stuff falls down in the laundry room. But he doesn't, he doesn't fix it.”

Claire connected this conduct to her landlord/manager's business model. She never had issues with maintenance and repair requests under her previous landlord/manager, who were a mother-daughter team and had owned and managed the building for about 40 years. The current landlord bought the building after the mother died with the intention to flip it, but he was unable to sell it after several attempts. Claire theorized that it is because five of the seven apartments have tenants paying significantly under market rate, “and so nobody wants to buy a building that has that many rent control people in it.” This theory is supported by the *market language* section of Chapter Five, which establishes the desirability of selling a rent-controlled apartment with as few occupied apartments as possible in order to charge market rents.

As in Raquel's situation with the leaking toilet, improperly performed maintenance led to recurrences or worsening of the issue in many instances. Joyce's

building was recently sold and the new owner hired a manager who “just doesn’t know what he’s doing.” When there was a sewage break in the building the manager tried to cover the smell with fragrance, rather than hiring a biohazard company to apply enzymes as Joyce suggested. As a result, the root cause of the issue was not addressed, and Joyce and her roommates were experiencing headaches from the methane gas. Eventually they emailed him again, explaining that they were becoming ill, and he hired a biohazard company to do the work. In Mariana’s building, the walkway in the common area has become “spongy” over the years, and unsafe for some of the older tenants. Mariana and her neighbors got together to discuss the safety issue and collectively asked the owner to address it. When the repairs were finally made after months of waiting, they were minimal, and now the issue has resurfaced:

“This is like a safety hazard, we have to push back and get them to come and repair this. So after months of requesting this repair, they finally did come out. And they only repaired the areas that were literally like a sponge. And that repair lasted maybe a couple years right? Because now it’s the same issue there. And we’re like going ‘this is not okay’, because the entire walkway actually would probably need to be redone. And they would never do that. That would be like ‘oh, that’s a cost that - you know, I can’t afford to do that’. Yeah, but legally, I think he should.”

To this point, almost half of participants feel that their landlord or manager tries to save money by doing the bare minimum to address an issue. Karli and her partner have the shortest tenure in the study, at three years, and are likely paying close to market rates. This is significant because cost-savings behavior makes the most sense when the tenant is paying significantly below market rents. Her impression of her landlord was positive overall, and she appreciated his responsiveness when the plumbing backed up and the sink overflowed into the kitchen while they were out of town. At the same time, she felt

frustrated that the incident has since reoccurred, and likely would not have if he were not trying to save money:

“He did like, act quickly and get a plumber out and get, and get like the cleaning service out. So really grateful for that...But in the end, I kind of felt like he should have...He should have like done it properly. So what he did was kind of like get the plumber to do like short term measures rather than actually, like, do a big, big, like, inspection or whatever they do, so it wouldn't happen again. So that was obviously frustrating, but I feel like that's because he wanted to save money somehow.”

However, not all had an entirely negative opinion of their landlord/manager based on the perception that saving money was a primary concern. Daphne weighed the pros and cons of having a landlord who is both frugal about maintenance and also allows tenants to have a certain level of autonomy.

“He's cheap, which is like most Santa Monica landlords. For the most part he's actually a pretty decent guy...He's temporarily living in the building, but he doesn't come knocking on the door for rent, we have to mail our rent to a PO box. He never just shows up on the doorstep and wants to do a walk through. If you want to paint your walls, you know psychedelic purple, go ahead. When I rented this place, I rented it as-is so I pretty much within reason do whatever I want.”

In conclusion, the breadth of landlord and property manager behavior likely reflects a combination of individual personality and business model, which is possibly informed by the cultural and ideology of the multifamily housing industry. It illustrates that there is no one way owners and managers of rent-controlled housing act, beyond a common approach of doing the bare minimum of maintenance required, rather than investing in renovations or improvements they will not be able to recoup in the near future by increasing rents. Thus, the residential experience varies greatly depending on the behavior of the landlord/manager.

7.3 The role of policy, infrastructure and resources

In order to understand the relationship between knowledge of tenant protections outlined in Chapter Four and various outcomes such as feelings of stability, participants were asked to share what they know about their rights as a renter in Santa Monica. Some individuals expressed that they know they are protected but do not have specific knowledge about various policies. Six participants shared the view that the law favors the tenant. Knowledge about the regulations that govern rent increases was most common (20 participants). This is not surprising, given that residents of rent-controlled housing receive two newsletters a year from the Rent Control Office, one of which has the next year's MAR for their residence printed on it. Two thirds of participants mentioned 'just cause' eviction policy and the existence of habitability standards (separately).

Notably, participants who had experienced issues were more knowledgeable due to their own research and/or interactions with City staff and other entities. Those who had not experienced significant issues had a vaguer awareness of tenant protections, but many were able to identify resources for information, should it be needed. This suggests that even with the somewhat surprisingly low levels of awareness of tenant protections, knowledge of how to access that information would facilitate support if needed.

Experiences accessing city resources

The majority of participants have engaged with one or more City entities that offer support to renters - whether around a specific conflict or to seek advice. There were 44 individual landlord/manager conflicts reported by 17 participants. Of the 34 that were resolved, half of them involved City resources and half were addressed through some

other means (e.g., private attorney). Of the 10 that were not resolved, three of them involved engagement with a city entity. These numbers suggest that City resources provide meaningful support for tenants of Santa Monica's rent controlled housing, and that there are other strategies available as well, including negotiating or compromising with the landlord or manager.

Three participants have been in contact with the City Attorney's office at some point. During the pandemic Vanessa was threatened with eviction because her partner - who was not on the lease but had lived in the home for years - issued the rent check. The City Attorney informed her about her rights and offered to send a letter to the manager, advising him of the relevant tenant protections during the pandemic: "You know they could only do so much, but they were definitely supportive and listened and gave me good advice." Years ago, Estelle contacted them when she was experiencing harassment from her property managers. The City Attorney wanted to bring a harassment case against her landlord under the new law but she decided not to pursue it.

Several participants have interacted with the RCB. When Heather's property manager tried to increase her rent by \$200 a month after re-building a rotting deck she appealed the sum, and the Rent Control Board settled on \$50 a month. Daphne received a rent reduction from the RCB in a past residence for a ceiling that had been damaged in the Northridge Earthquake and leveraged the threat of filing a petition for reduction at her current home to persuade the owner to repair a heater. She compared Santa Monica's "much stricter" rent control law with Los Angeles, which is "a little bit more relaxed." Conversely, Santa Monica has a "reputation, if you have a problem with your landlord then you go to the Rent [Control] Board and they're always there to help you, and they

will fight for you, and they will give you advice.” According to Diane, the RCB is “very tough on landlords.” She feels that the Board is instrumental in protecting tenants, whereas City Council does not seem to be very “pro-renter.”

Participants engaged with the RCO more frequently than any other City resource. Ten participants have had a positive experience with the RCO; two have not been able to resolve their problem; and five have never interacted with the office but are aware of their services. Vanessa contacted them when the property manager took away her carport space, in order to retrieve the necessary documents to prove that she was legally entitled to the space. Raquel called them when the front lawn of her building had not been tended to in months, and the owner addressed it shortly thereafter. Christina reported improperly repaired bathroom plumbing to the RCO, and they required the owner to fix it to the standards of city code. Joyce called them about a collapsed ceiling and mold, and they sent out 13 personnel to address the problem. She had to move out of her apartment for seven months while the work was being completed, during which time she received relocation assistance.

Ramona characterized the RCO as “very supportive.” Though she tries not to contact them unless there is a “dire need,” they have been helpful in assisting her when she has reached out. In one instance they proactively reached out to inform her that the owner of her home had applied (and been granted permission) to remove it from rent control. On another occasion they helped resolve a situation in which the landlord was charging more than the MAR. In a previous home, Code Enforcement came out (ostensibly at the RCO’s behest) and intervened when her landlord was non-responsive to

a request to fix a hole in the floor. She concluded the interview by encouraging other Santa Monica renters to reach out to the RCO with their issues:

“You know that I've lived in the rent-controlled units for a long time. I would like to share to the people that are not too aware of rent control and they're more hesitant because they're nervous and scared or that they'll get you know...they'll get called out or whatnot, not to be afraid to go and seek help at the rent control because they're there to help you.”

Even though Ramona understands that her landlord is legally allowed to remove her family from their home under the owner-occupant clause of the rent control law, she feels supported by the RCO. Furthermore, she urges other renters who may feel vulnerable to retaliation to assert their rights with the support of the office. This illustrates that for Ramona, though she may have lost this particular battle, Santa Monica tenants are still well-positioned to advocate for themselves in landlord-tenant disputes.

7.4 De facto and perceptual security and insecurity

As referenced above, some participants mentioned feelings of stability/security or a lack thereof in several sections of the interview, mainly when discussing their relationship with their landlord/manager, feeling ‘at home’ or not ‘at home’, or in describing what they like or do not like about their apartment. They also shared common experiences that sometimes led to feelings of insecurity, and in other instances did not.

Direct threats

Just over one third of participants have experienced a threat to their housing or heard about their neighbors experiencing one. Rent checks that were either sent to the wrong address, written by an occupant not on the lease, lost in the mail, received late, or

altered by the landlord were a common scenario. When asked if she ever feels like the owner would like the building's long-term tenants to leave, Claire explained:

“Oh yes, oh yes. He started a campaign to get me out...He called me on the 15th of the month, and said he didn't receive my check. And I, of course I had mailed it for it to get there on the first. And when he done that three times I said, you know that's three months in a row he didn't get my check he can put me out. So I was at the bank, and I was telling the bank manager, I said 'I don't know what I'm gonna do he's going to put me out'. He said, 'oh no, you're going to set up automatic payments. So he did, so it's automatically paid, so I haven't heard from him since.”

Patrick recalled a similar incident with a previous landlord:

“The surfer boy dude, he was starting to run out of money near the end of his tenure. I could tell that. So he wanted me out so he could raise the rent, and he took one of my checks and altered the date on it, so it made it look like I paid late, and sued me and put an eviction notice on my door - a three day pay or quit.”

Patrick hired a Legal Aid attorney and successfully fought the eviction suit, discovering in the process that the landlord had been overcharging him for rent each month. In addition to prevailing against the fraudulent eviction, the landlord was also ordered to pay him the back rent that was due. According to Consumer Specialist Andrea Cavanaugh at the Public Rights Division, these rent check scenarios are one of the most common bad faith landlord behaviors the office hears about from tenants (personal interview, 2021).

Building sales are a common source of anxiety for residents of Santa Monica's rent-controlled housing, and with good reason. Ramona and her family had been living in a duplex for 11 years when the building was sold to a new owner, who moved into the other apartment and filed a petition to remove the building from rent control. After her petition was granted, the new owner informed Ramona that she wanted her to move out,

and if she did not, that her husband planned to raise the rent by an unspecified amount. In the meantime, the owner has engaged in extensive and disruptive renovations. Ramona speculated that “they just want us out - plain and simple,” and that they may be planning on flipping the property.

When Raquel’s building was sold the new owner approached several of her neighbors with cash-for-keys offers, which created the impression that they wish to remove the current tenants. Raquel researched her rights and discovered several legal discrepancies in the information the owner provided to her neighbors. Additionally, she feels that the new owner is making a minimal effort to maintain the property. Given these tactics - which are contextualized by the data in the *Market Language* section - she is uncertain about the future of her tenancy.

The Role of Tenant Protections

Almost two-thirds of the study participants expressed positive sentiments about tenant protections at some point in the interview. These opinions came up organically in the conversation, and many of these included expressions of gratitude for the stability that rent control confers. Heather, who is semi-retired and has lived in her home for 43 years, “literally could not be here without rent control, as many of us [long-time tenants] could not.” Selena, another longtime resident, compares it to winning the lottery. She is thankful to both the city and the RCB. Despite - or perhaps because of - Vanessa’s struggles over the years with her property manager, rent control has been “that security in your home when you know that you can live there from year-to-year without some unexpected increase that would price you out of your home.” Diane feels lucky to still be

in her home after decades, and feels protected by the RCB in the possible instance that her building is sold. Katya feels that the policy is “designed to allow folks to live with a sense of dignity and be able to have a sense of self in their own space,” due to its stabilizing effects. Selena describes the peace of mind that rent control provides as more than financial, consisting additionally of an “emotional factor for many of us [seniors].”

Some participants took a broader social view of the benefits of Santa Monica’s tenant protections to the community. As Ramona explained,

“...without rent control the majority of the people who are of different color, they’ll end up leaving. They’ll be pushed out because of the high rent and the only ones that’ll be able to afford it would be you know, the people who mainly want to be here because of the businesses, because you know, their jobs, or because of the ocean - the Silicon Beach.”

Rena agrees, crediting rent control with strengthening socioeconomic diversity and enabling seniors and artists to remain in the city. Stability and diversity increase community engagement, and in this sense rent control has “uplifted this community in a way that it would not be this community by any means without it.”

Participants were also directly asked if their knowledge of and experience with tenant protections had an impact on feelings of stability in their homes. Two-thirds of participants responded affirmatively and pointed to rent control specifically. These participants have had a range of experiences with their landlords/managers, from repeated conflict to no issues over the course of decades in the same home. Diane described her living situation as “stress free” due to the city’s tenant protections and a proactive RCB. For Patrick, tenant protections give him a “sense of security...knowing that there are things that help me and protect me for my own good, and the good of other tenants.”

Georgia, who is retired and lives on a fixed income, explained that the impact of tenant protections on her housing stability is “1000%, couldn’t do it without it.”

Despite a relatively short tenancy and a rent close to market rates, Karli also reported that knowing her rent can only increase by a fixed amount is a “big factor” in feelings of stability. Rent control and other protections have given Nate peace of mind through the financial vicissitudes of both the pandemic and freelance work. Knowing that his family’s housing costs were predictable means that he “never had to worry that we’d have to move or find something or downsize.” In the early days of the pandemic and the pervasive financial uncertainty due to Nate and his partner’s line of work, he never worried that they would lose their housing. Instead, he felt confident that the city and state would protect renters. In general, he is comforted by the knowledge that the landlord cannot simply force them out to raise the rent. Katya has a prior history with rent-controlled housing in the Bay Area. When she was a child, her family immigrated to the United States in the 1990s from Eastern Europe with a few hundred dollars. Their rent-controlled apartment provided essential security in the midst of rapidly escalating rents, and enabled them save money to eventually buy their own home. According to Katya, a rent-controlled apartment is a “resource:”

“A safe stable place to call home is a major part of achieving the American dream quote unquote right? And so having a home is important to be able to really work on yourself and become the person you think you want to be, and become the person that you believe you should be within society.”

For Katya, who is in her early 30s, her home provides her with the stability to envision the realization of ‘possible selves’ (Hackett, et al., 2019) and invest her time in her community. After moving from Eastern Europe to the Bay Area and then to another

Northern California town for college, she has lived in her current apartment longer than anywhere else and considers Santa Monica to be her “adopted home.” Knowing that she has these protections makes her feel empowered to handle potential conflicts: if she or her friends experience issues with their rent-controlled Santa Monica apartments, she knows how to access helpful resources.

Several participants also listed other elements that cultivate feelings of stability and security. Four people feel stable in their homes primarily because of their relationship with their landlord/manager. Not surprisingly, none of them have ever experienced a conflict or significant issues with their landlord or property manager. A positive relationship with one’s landlord may preclude engagement with the protections to the extent that there would be little basis for some individuals to evaluate their role in feelings of stability. Additionally, three participants connected feelings of stability to a consistent income, two of whom also feel supported by tenant protections.

Perceptual Insecurity and The Limitations of Tenant Protections

At the same time, a number of individuals expressed concern about remaining in their homes despite possessing in most cases at least a basic knowledge of tenant protections (de jure security). Even for those who have not experienced a direct threat of displacement (de facto insecurity), knowledge of the housing market, stories from friends and neighbors, and media coverage create an atmosphere of latent precarity (perceptual insecurity). The code *Stability: fear of displacement* was applied 46 times, and was expressed by 15 participants, with tenancies ranging from nine to 47 years.

Though Sharon is well-educated about her rights she does not feel protected. She worries that “ultimately if they really wanted to, they would find a way to make my life miserable,” citing a recent noise complaint she received that stoked deep anxieties. She worried that even this minor issue could jeopardize her ability to remain in her home of over three decades. When asked if she thought the management wanted her to leave, she said “yes,” but added:

“They've never done anything that I could cite as being an example of that. I think it may be very justified but it's really my own fear about it. It's probably a justifiable concern that the unit downstairs from me - it is cooler but it's darker and noisier - you know, is renting for at least double when I pay.”

In this case the destabilizing element is the knowledge of the substantial rent gap (see Chapter Four) rather than an especially contentious relationship with the landlord or manager. For this reason, she tries to remain “invisible” by requesting only the bare minimum of repairs and investing her own money on needed maintenance.

Loopholes like the Ellis Act or an owner move-in – combined with knowledge of the rent gap and industry practices like upscaling - are another major factor undermining perceptions of stability and protection. Several participants cited tangible threats to this effect, such as a building sale. After Raquel heard about several of her neighbors receiving buy-out offers from the new ownership she feels “a little shaky...I mean I don't know if it's just insecurity that I have, or we just don't know when the next shoe's going to fall,” despite also feeling somewhat protected.

Up until recently Lisa had an uneventful relationship with her property manager and landlord. She found out about the sale when the management company notified her that they planned to send someone to assess her apartment, and she looked online and

saw a listing for the building. They put up a ‘for sale’ sign shortly thereafter and did not communicate with the tenants about their plans. Though the new owners have not given the residents any reason to suspect that they plan to remove them from their homes, Lisa has a “looming dread” that they will try to convert the building to condominiums or something similar. To assuage her fears Lisa contacted the Rent Control Office when she learned her building was for sale. The perspective she received was sobering:

“Yeah he literally said ‘just face it, you're not gonna be able to live here [in Santa Monica] anymore’ ...I think he was probably sympathetic in certain ways, but trying to give me that truth, that like ‘you know you gotta, have to face certain facts. That it's just not viable. You know what most of the rent is here and it's pretty sad’.”

For others, the fear of a sale is present in the back of their mind. Selena has a close relationship with her on-site landlord, but realizes that one day the family could sell the building. There was a time when she “literally used to have nightmares that I would lose my apartment, because that’s how important financially and emotionally this apartment has been to me. It was the thing that scared me almost the most.” As she approaches retirement age, she has made peace with that possibility, and with the knowledge that she would not be able to stay in Santa Monica. Mariana described similar fears shared by longtime residents of her building. She reasoned that there is so much deferred maintenance, a new owner would likely demolish or otherwise renovate the building. Though that would require offering the tenants a buy-out offer, it would not be enough for the longtime tenants to afford another home in Santa Monica. This has prevented them from reporting some of the more serious habitability concerns to the City: “I think the fear that everyone has is that reporting the owner would mean that if he were to sell, right, if he said ‘screw you guys, I'm going to sell the building’, then we would all

be homeless.” Nate shared the same fear, speculating that if tenants push the landlord too hard to make repairs, they will sell the building. This notion is “not based on any real fear other than just hearing stories of people being Ellis Act’d [evicted] and you know, that exact thing happening to other people in other parts of the city.” In this sense, knowledge of policy loopholes and industry business practices create perceptions of precarity among renters.

Lastly, participants who have contentious relationships with their landlords/managers must strategically manage their interactions in anticipation of potential threats. Amy is hypervigilant about documenting all interactions with her landlord, based on knowledge of their fraudulent eviction tactics. Even though she has had positive interactions seeking support from the City Attorney’s Office, this process of self-advocacy is “exhausting.” Vanessa feels protected by the city’s policies and resources, but realizes that she is still at the mercy of the property manager and HOA due to the integral role they play in her housing stability and tranquility. While she has thus far navigated several conflicts and resolved them mostly in her favor with the HOA’s support, she fears that the situation could worsen with a personnel change. When asked if her knowledge of tenant protections makes her feel more secure in her home, she explained:

“I think there's a benefit because you know they're there. And I know I have more protections here, but it's omnipresent...it's just always that unknown, what could come up next, and you don't know what it is and if you're protected. The baseline is, I know I'm more protected, I'm pretty protected, but I'm also - you never know, you know, what they're going to try and pull...”

This ambiguity around possible landlord tactics and the limits of tenant protections and self-advocacy is a source of anxiety and fatigue for Amy and Vanessa. Though the City has tried to address ever-evolving landlord tactics through its various policies and resources, there remains behavior that is just beyond the reach of protections like the anti-harassment ordinance, which require proof of intention on the part of the landlord. Moreover, the burden of proof is on the tenant, who meanwhile must try to make a home in a hostile environment.

Coping strategies

Given these challenges, participants described several coping strategies for navigating the landlord/manager relationship. The most common approach was avoidance. Eight participants expressed a hesitancy to ask for anything beyond essential basic maintenance, due to a fear of negative consequences. For Sharon, the knowledge that she would have to leave Santa Monica if she was displaced from her home means the stakes are high for maintaining a conflict-free relationship with the manager. She has the second-longest tenancy in the building, which means she has a high level of vulnerability in terms of the rent gap. After receiving an \$80 bill the last several times she reported a plumbing issue in her kitchen, she decided that given the money she is able to save with a lower rent, “not rocking the boat” and “being invisible” is more important than fighting an unfair charge. She also explained that it feels like a trade-off to spend her own money to address deferred maintenance, because it is still less of an expense than “having to spend like twice as much and rent for the rest of my life” on a market rent if she were to lose her home.

Vanessa, another participant with decades of residency in her home, feels similarly that it is best to have as little contact with her building manager as possible - especially given a history of conflict. When maintenance needs to be performed in her apartment, she is faced with the decision to handle it herself or ask the manager. Ultimately, she decided that “staying under the radar was way more important to me than the money,” given the omnipresent threat of harassment. Because Vanessa’s skill set enables her to address many maintenance issues herself, she is in a unique position among study participants. After weighing her options and considering what is at stake, Vanessa prefers to do what work she can on her apartment:

“When I asked for things, what I've found to be true is they will do whatever is minimally required by law. And if I really wanted new carpet I probably could have asked for it. But my M.O. has always been I would deal with them as little as possible, and ask for as little as possible. I'd rather do it myself, so that they can't come after me for anything.”

Dave also prefers to do his own maintenance when possible because his skill set enables him to exceed the quality of work his landlord performs. While he is not concerned about displacement per se, many of his neighbors prefer to avoid contact with the landlord and ask him to help instead. He theorized that “they don’t really want to get in trouble, or they don't want to cause too much attention upon themselves.” Similarly, many of Christina’s neighbors in her building are monolingual Spanish speakers with a mix of citizenship statuses. While Christina feels comfortable pursuing habitability issues with the landlord or Code Enforcement, most of her neighbors prefer to make repairs themselves. Many of them are longtime tenants who have raised children in the complex, and like most of the participants, depend on retaining their current housing to remain in Santa Monica. As such, they live in a state of perpetual insecurity: “They just kind of go

about their business, but I don't think they're comfortable...like any little thing wrong... they could be kicked out I guess is their fear.”

Gina and most of her neighbors also prefer not to ask the manager for repairs or improvements unless absolutely necessary, out of fear of “being a bother.” She related a lengthy story about a neighbor who lived below her when she first moved in and had eventually been evicted after asking for many repairs. Though she was unclear on the details and unsure of who was ultimately in the wrong, the incident served as a cautionary tale. She prefers to do what work she can, which has included installing her own thermostat and unclogging pipes. Though she asked for new carpet at the behest of a past roommate, that was an exception: “It’s part of that anxiety. I don’t want to be a bother because the more I request from them, the more they want me out.” Notably, Gina has never had a problem with her landlord, and even described them as “pretty reasonable.”

Three participants have adopted a ‘strength in numbers’ strategy, making sure that multiple neighbors report the same incident so they are not labeled as a troublesome tenant. After being told that “it’s always you,” Luis first checks with his neighbors to determine if an issue is building-wide. If the problem is within his apartment alone, he will try to fix it if possible, and will only call the manager as a last resort:

“I try not to deal with him if I can help it, you know. I'll check with my neighbors. If there's like an issue regarding the entire building, I'll check with them first and have them report it and then I'll report it. So it's not just like there's one of us reporting an issue. It's coming from multiple people. And so we can all back each other up...so he can't deny or throw his hands up when you know, it's the whole building complaining. As for like smaller issues within my apartment, if I can fix it myself, I'll fix it myself...if I need to call him I'll call him, I just don't particularly like to.”

Though Joyce has taken on the role of advocate in the past, she also prefers to report a problem as a group, explaining, “I’ve found that it’s better in numbers so that I’m not the squeaky wheel, I’m not the complainer, I’m not the troublemaker. Because a lot of times the one that takes the lead is the troublemaker.” Mariana and her neighbors had a discussion about how to get the landlord to make essential repairs to a dangerous walkway and decided to approach him as a group.

Two participants were hesitant to report issues due to experiences with previous landlords and managers, rather than based on the circumstances of their current living arrangement. Bonnie has one of the shortest tenancies in the study (five years), and is paying relatively close to market rent. She has no reason to fear her landlord would want her to move out and has a generally positive rapport with him. Still, she prefers not to ask for repairs unless necessary:

“I mean, I think it’s just hesitance and like, not wanting to be a bother. I’ve had a lot of crappy landlords in the past. And it always felt like...a confrontation, to ask for something. And it became an unpleasant experience and relationship as though I’d done something wrong. So I think it’s just sort of fear-based from like, historical experience.”

In contrast, Patrick and Rena are both longtime tenants who have found strategies to assert themselves in interactions with their landlord/managers when needed, without fear of reprisal. Patrick has a contentious relationship with his landlord, and simply dismisses communications that are not to his liking. This confidence in the face of a perceived intent to remove him from his home may be due to past successes in conflicts with the landlord: “He’s always trying to come up with stupid excuses to get me out of here...so, he’s alright, he’s just, you know, I do what I want. And he says something, I tell him forget it. We move along in life.”

Rena has a generally positive relationship with her landlord/manager. She describes him as an ethical person who also takes a long time to complete needed work, and will usually only do the bare minimum to address an issue. She theorized that he trusts her and her partner due to their length of tenancy and listens to them when the importance of something is emphatically stated: “He knows I’m not bullshitting when something’s gone awry, because I don’t complain a lot.” Her strategies are to choose her battles, follow-up repeatedly, and when necessary, use words that convey possible outcomes he may want to avoid:

“Sometimes there's about four or five of us who can get better service because we've been here the longest [and] we know how to talk to them. And when we have to, we know the special words to say. Like ‘you don't want a liability here, you don't want a lien, you don't want the health department to come out’. You know? But that's taken a long time to kind of negotiate and learn about and not use inappropriately or as a threat, just to remind him. Maybe I use it once every four or five years.”

After decades of living in their building Rena and her partner have developed an understanding of how to engage with their landlord/manager to get desired results without putting themselves at risk. However, as illustrated above, for many participants the dynamic is fraught with tension and difficult decisions. Even when the law is on one’s side, the possibility remains that the landlord will make life so unpleasant that continuing to reside in the home is untenable whether that is the intention or not.

7.5 Relationship of these experiences to behavior and decisions

Financial landscape

The majority of participants (25) have a rent/income ratio that is sustainable long-term. Two were not able to answer this question due to an evolving financial situation,

two did not know, and one cannot continue paying their current rent indefinitely on their retirement income.

For many participants, having predictable housing costs has had a tangible impact on their financial wellbeing, and by extension, their greater wellbeing. In Bonnie's case, even a \$100 monthly rent increase would have been impactful. Now with a slightly higher paying job than her previous one and fixed housing costs, she is able to save for the future. Karli and her partner prioritize their rent first, then bills and other expenses, and whatever is left over enables them to "splurge" a little and save as well. Christina has money to spend on her children that she would not if the rent was higher. Daphne can travel overseas to visit her family with the money that she saves. Several participants have been saving or have saved to buy property outside the Los Angeles area. Rent control has enabled some of the older participants (over 50) to save for retirement and contribute to Roth IRA accounts.

For others the rent/income ratio provides a cushion for life's unexpected vicissitudes. Daphne was able to afford a mandatory 20% pay cut during the early days of the pandemic, and after her salary was restored, she now saves that portion of her paycheck for retirement. Heather was able to pay for substantial medical bills when she had lymphoma, while retaining her housing and avoiding debt.

Capacity, decisions and wellbeing

The stability facilitated by Santa Monica's tenant protections impacts residents' personal capacity and wellbeing, and by extension, life decisions like career changes and retirement. This is the case for participants across the age and tenure length spectrum.

Planning for the future is one aspect. When she first moved into her apartment in the mid-1990s, Georgia was excited to be protected by rent control because the fixed housing costs meant she would have a chance to retire. Without it she feared she would have to work for her entire life. Instead, she was able to retire at age 65. Raquel will also be able to retire soon if she is able to stay in her apartment and does not face an Ellis Act eviction. For Vanessa, knowing that the rent is not a substantial portion of their income allows her and her partner more flexibility with what they plan for the future. Katya is also able to plan more long term due to her housing stability.

Increased capacity is another outcome. Rena and her partner have lived in their home for over four decades and are highly active members of the community. Between paying low rent and having generally low overhead they were both able to retire early. With their increased capacity they commit the time they were spending at work to volunteering in the community. Her partner was also able to take care of his father when he was ill, in a way he would not have been otherwise:

“It's recognizing that if your energy and your income and all of your productivity has to go to a lump sum for housing it totally limits either physical time or psychological energy or talent, resources, and assets that you can give back.”

“We have our community...we believe really deeply in that. And not having to worry about where we're living or the pressures of how much the rent is taking out of our income on a monthly basis, really it's not a stress. We're blessed in that way.”

Amy echoed this sentiment about increased capacity to realize possible selves. She had been previously living in a more expensive apartment in the Westwood neighborhood of Los Angeles. When she got a large increase, she started looking for a rent-controlled apartment in Santa Monica and moved into her current home in 1994. At

the time she was searching for a living arrangement with less overhead so she could pursue creative endeavors without the burden of a full-time job. She has been able to achieve that goal and save money in the process as a result of living in a rent controlled home.

Tenant protections are also a consideration in major life decisions. During the pandemic Sarah decided that she needed a change from her current job, which was creating unsustainable stress. She credits her stabilized rent (and positive relationship with her landlord) with supporting that decision, by enabling her to take on a lower-paying position without worrying about a large rent increase. Luis has also enjoyed the flexibility to make life choices that best suit his needs because his rent is predictable and affordable. In the past 15 years he has lived in his home he has been able to leave his job to pursue other opportunities on several occasions:

“Because my rent is affordable I feel like I have the leeway to change jobs, or, you know, start a new projects, you know, or start a new business or take some time off and travel...I have a lot of flexibility there, because I'm not always worrying about coming up with rent the next month, so I'm secure financially.”

Several participants with long-term tenancies reflected on some of the ways their housing has provided a supportive foundation for their life choices in the past. Claire was able to stay in a low-paying job that she loved for 19 years, due to her affordable rent and stable housing. Vanessa changed careers and attended graduate school, both of which she attributes to knowing that her housing costs were predictable. When Estelle first moved into her apartment in the early 1980s, she had no family support, but her rent controlled apartment opened opportunities for her:

“[My rent controlled apartment] enabled me at the time to work and to go to school, which is what I did. So I put all my time and effort into working and going to school, trying to build a career and also trying to be a good member of the community.”

Several years ago, Mariana was able to leave a six figure job and open a private practice, cutting her hours in half. She explained, “...[stability through rent control] allows me to make decisions - like not only do I feel stable, I don’t have to work a 40 hour week...and I can afford to pay my bills and I can afford to save, and I can afford many things, and I don’t have to work extra...I work less than 20 hours. ” For Mariana, who grew up in her home and raised her (now adult) son there as well, stable housing through Santa Monica’s tenant protections have increased her capacity to realize possible selves. She is also able to continue living in her hometown and in her community in the Pico Neighborhood, to which she is deeply attached. Having stable housing costs - combined with less responsibility than a homeowner - has also increased her quality of life:

“That's one of the benefits of living in rent control. And I appreciate that, probably more than most. Because when I compare my livelihood to others of my age, who are, you know, paying mortgages and like maybe they have a really nice home, but they're also working really hard to keep up their homes and pay their mortgages and send their kids to college. And I'm able to do that and not have that stress that goes along with all that.”
member of the community.”

For some participants, housing has played an *unconscious* role in their decision-making process. Bonnie started her own freelance business three years ago, a few years after moving into her apartment. While her housing was not an active part of that decision, while talking through it in the interview she reflected, “knowing that I had a generally stable housing situation probably made it easier for me to make a move towards

starting my own business.” Similarly for Gina, who recently accepted a much lower-paying job that she enjoys more than her previous one, her housing “did not play as direct a role as it could have, but it played an indirect role because it’s something that I didn’t worry about.”

Participation and Community Engagement

A number of other participants identified housing stability and expected longevity of tenure, facilitated by tenant protections, as an active component in their capacity to build community, and their decision to participate in various volunteer activities. For Ramona, knowing that she will be able to afford her home in the foreseeable future makes her feel able to commit to working with local organizations long term. Nate connected his family’s housing stability with his increasing investment in the community, including following local politics and volunteering at his son’s school and youth sports. He also appreciates that his son can cultivate friendships without having to worry about moving and losing his friends. Katya participates in an astonishing number of organizations and other volunteer activities. She connected housing stability - through both tenant protections and her current income - with her capacity and decision to dedicate more of her time to these endeavors.

Vanessa is another highly active member of her community. She is almost 30 years older than Katya but shared very similar sentiments. The security she experiences through tenant protections confers a sense of ownership and investment in the community she has called home for four decades. As someone who highly values community engagement, it is possible that she would be involved on some level no matter what her

housing arrangement, but she attributes this behavior in part to the fact that she knows she can live in her home long term.

Maintenance and upgrades

One third of study participants connected their decision to invest time and resources in maintaining or upgrading their home with the housing stability and affordability conferred by tenant protections. Several others reported that they would probably do the work either way because they want their home to be in good condition and the landlord does not maintain it to their desired level of quality. Diane has felt comfortable paying for painting and carpet replacement over the years, based on the knowledge that she will be able to remain in her home long term. Rena and Mariana are similarly willing to invest financially in their longtime homes.

Mariana sees home improvements as “a good investment because I’m not going anywhere. If I want my home to look nice, it’s going to be because I make it look nice.” Over the years she has redone the floors and cabinets, bought her own appliances, and painted many times. Patrick also pays for periodic maintenance like painting and flooring. For him, “stability has a lot to do with it...because I treat this like it’s my home.” Selena’s decision to invest in upgrading her apartment over the years is connected to her sense of stability and financial sustainability through rent control, her relationship with her landlords, and her attachment to her home:

“...people said ‘you're putting money [in] and you don't even own?’ ...And I said ‘I've had rent control for 30 years. It's 30 years, I can do this.’ It's not only ‘can’, I want to...She [the owner] let me choose the tile I wanted, the color - I put stainless steel counters in my kitchen...what apartment’s gonna let you put in a stainless steel counter?”

For Nate and his family, the knowledge that they can stay in their home for the foreseeable future is a factor in how much money they allocate for upgrades. In turn, he surmises that the more improvements they do, the more the space will feel like a permanent home. However, because he and his partner are relatively young and upwardly mobile, they are not sure exactly how long they will stay in their home. For this reason, they have held back on some larger investments like replacing kitchen cabinets for the time being.

In conclusion, more participants experience the stabilizing effect of tenant protections than do not. This is despite challenging landlord/manager relationships, and knowledge of market conditions. There are many decisions and behaviors that residents of rent-controlled housing consider vis a vis their housing arrangements. The next chapter will discuss the implications of these findings, including how the person-place relationship and the elements of residential alienation and insecurity co-exist.

Chapter Eight: Discussion

As outlined in Chapter One, the factors that inform the experience of dwelling in this study can be organized into two clusters. Group one includes localized sociopolitical ideology about renting, the rental housing and real estate market, the sociolegal tenant protection landscape, and the landlord or property manager's personality and business model. Together these inform security, insecurity, and the residential experience. Perceptions of security or insecurity, as well as interactions with the landlord/manager and their material outcomes, determine the extent to which one experiences residential alienation in the residence itself. Group two includes environmental features (e.g., nature, climate, amenities), social fabric, sociocultural/socioeconomic character (on all scales), political climate and citywide issues, and characteristics of the dwelling and building itself (not including maintenance). Together these inform the person-place relationship, which can be understood with constructs like place attachment, place alienation and sense of community, which have a bearing on an individual's desire to remain in their home environment despite challenges.

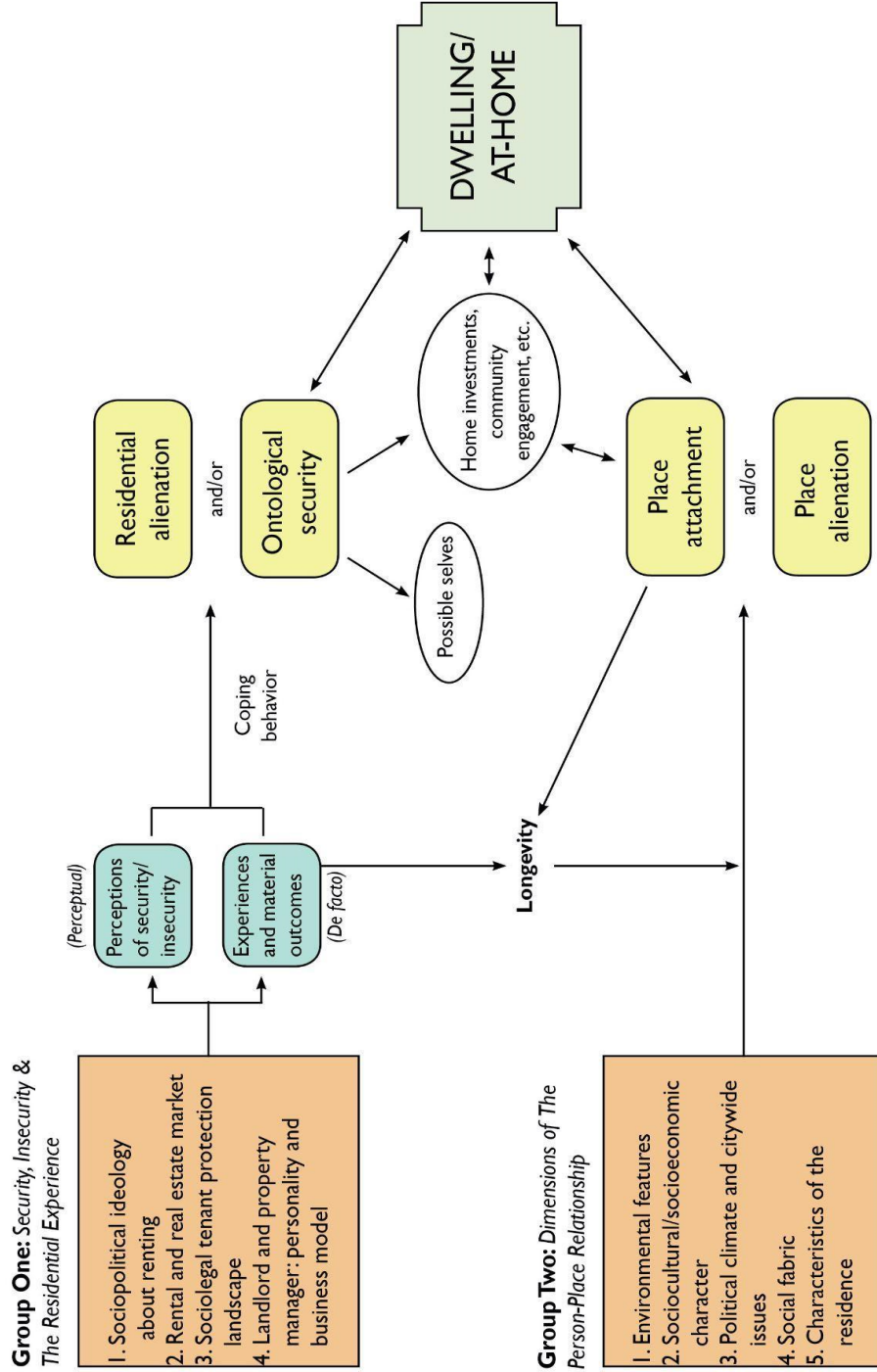
Place relationships are dynamic, dialectic processes that are ever-changing (Manzo, 2003). The emotions and cognitions about place in Group Two combine with the perceptions and experiences that arise from Group One to inform one's sense of 'at-homeness' and subsequent behaviors. These behaviors include the decision to remain in the home, to invest in home improvements, and/or to participate in community groups. A sense of ontological security in the home may also factor into decisions like changing careers, returning to school, or retiring early.

In this chapter I draw on the literature about the person-place relationship, security of tenure, ontological security, power dynamics, and residential alienation to consider how this form of tenure - in this very unique context - can be understood vis a vis other tenure types and contexts. Key findings include the role of tenants' coping behavior and what it implies about both mobility and place attachment, and the extent to which policy supports stability and dwelling. I also revise my original focus on tenant protections to consider the role of other factors that are included in Group One. Finally, I highlight the value of examining the holistic lived experience of being *at home* - and its unknown externalities - in housing studies and policy evaluation. It is admittedly challenging to disaggregate these elements, especially since some of them - true to the phenomenological epistemology from which they originate - are deeply intertwined. That there were participants who expressed seemingly contradictory views about the same topic at times underscores the complexity of this inquiry.

While I originally conceptualized dwelling and residential alienation as arrayed on two ends of a spectrum, I revised my understanding during the interview and analysis process. I now theorize that residential alienation at lower levels does not *preclude* dwelling, as evidenced by participants who feel at home despite experiencing aspects of residential alienation. I posit that place attachment, place alienation, ontological security and residential alienation can be experienced at different levels that fluctuate over time as circumstances evolve. This gestures at dwelling and place attachment on other scales, as residents sometimes manage difficult or stressful conditions in order to continue to access their preferred location (neighborhood, city, region).

Much as the body uses homeostasis to maintain a physical equilibrium, I theorize that individuals manage stressors to the best of their ability to realize dwelling. The impact of these experiences in the home is also mediated through individual factors like personality, mental and physical health, relationship status and financial status (Giddens, 1991), which is beyond the scope of this research. Figure 10 illustrates how these aspects of the residential experience, the person-place relationship, and various behaviors are connected. The following sections discuss how the findings map onto the primary research questions.

Figure 10: Concept map of the relationship between the two groups that inform dwelling



8.1 Research Question One

The extent to which participants feel at home or not at home

The overwhelming majority of participants answered affirmatively, without caveat, when asked if they feel at home in their residence. Additionally, those who expressed opinions of their apartments when asked to describe them were overwhelmingly positive. Though different in terms of both number of respondents and research design, Morris et al.'s (2021) study on the experience of living in market rental housing in Sydney and Melbourne has a focus and framing similar to my research. They asked many of the same interview questions about the residential experience, and a significantly smaller percentage of participants in their study reported feeling completely at home in their residences. The most salient conditions informing the degree to which their respondents experienced a sense of home were the physical condition, maintenance, the ability to personalize the space, the relationship with the landlord or manager, and the quality of the neighborhood. Many of my participants have experienced issues with one or more of these aspects, but still reported feeling at home. The discrepancy between these findings among renters in two 'homeowner societies' suggests a mediating variable between the two contexts. I propose that those variables are the sociolegal (policy) and sociopolitical (ideology about renting) landscape in Santa Monica.

Participants also expressed their attachment to their home environment on a multitude of scales, ranging from residence to the Los Angeles area. They used affective language like "love," "attached," "blessed," and "rooted" to describe their relationships to place. This attachment is also illustrated by their desire to remain in their home environment. The majority of participants hope to stay in their homes for the foreseeable

future at least, and over one third plan to remain as long as possible. Only two people were actively considering leaving their homes and the area, and one is doing so only out of financial necessity. The desire to remain in place was variously attributed to positive aspects of the residence, building, neighborhood, city and region. This finding emphasizes the value of considering the person-place relationship on different scales, and expands our understanding of ‘home’ as an existential state that extends beyond the residence itself (Manzo, 2003). Moreover, this desire to remain persists despite the issues and challenges participants shared. This aligns with Easthope’s (2004) explanation that “people often make economic decisions not purely as rational actors, but rather based on their ideas about the nature of different ‘places’...” (p 136). In other words, the attachments people have with their home environments frequently operate on a deeper level than the cost/benefit framework of economics.

Factors that contribute to the experience of being at home in the residence

Participants answered the question, “what makes your apartment feel like home?” and they also shared what they like best about their home. The ability to personalize the space was one of the top two answers to the first question. For participants, personalization includes creating a cozy or comfortable space, filling the home with items that have personal meaning, and the ability to paint or make other customizations. Several people also mentioned enjoying the autonomy that they experience vis a vis their landlord, which manifests as a *laissez faire* approach to management that enables residents to have more control over their households. This finding maps onto the *autonomy* component of Kearns et al.’s (2000) conceptualization of ontological security.

Having good neighbors and a positive social atmosphere in the building is also important to feeling at home. This includes longevity of neighbors, knowing who neighbors are, and feeling a sense of community. The significance of neighbors is largely tied to feelings of trust, support, and consistency - more so than actual friendships. Almost two-thirds participants have exchanged favors with neighbors, two-thirds described neighbors as friendly or considerate, and two-thirds mentioned their longevity of tenure. Only five participants had issues with some of their neighbors. This aligns with Hiscock et al.'s (2001) findings on neighbors, ontological security and constancy in the environment. The importance of longevity of neighbor tenure and positive neighbor relationships suggests that the material outcomes of rent control have a direct positive effect on ontological security and at-homeness, vis a vis the social fabric of the apartment building community.

The length of time in the home environment (on all scales) was also a significant factor in feeling at home in the residence. Several people who either grew up in their neighborhood or have lived there for decades mentioned the importance of biographical associations embedded in the built environment, which is consistent with Rowles' (1990) construct of autobiographical insidedness. Raising children in the home was also connected to the passage of time, which aligns with Dupuis & Thorns' (1998) findings on drivers of ontological security. For others, simply the duration of time *itself* was important, which supports Lewicka's (2014) and Degnen's (2016) findings on the importance of everyday routine in the formation of place attachment.

Finally, many participants shared aspects of their residences and apartment buildings that meet their needs in some way. Whether attributed to amenities, physical

characteristics, location, or feelings of safety and wellbeing, the psycho-social and material benefits of their residential environment outweigh stressors and annoyances like deferred and improperly performed maintenance more often than not. It is also true that constrained mobility means that some participants are enduring less-than-ideal conditions in their residences in order to remain in their home environment. Still, the use of affective language, attachment language, and expressions of gratitude towards both their apartment and rent control policy - along with reporting that they feel at home - suggest an overall residential satisfaction, ontological security and holistic state of dwelling that for most participants transcends the aspects of residential alienation discussed below.

Factors that detract from feeling at home in the residence (residential alienation)

Though 26 out of 30 participants reported feeling ‘at home’, there were some outliers who had mixed or negative feelings. Lisa feels mostly at home, with the exception of some events outside of her apartment building that impact her sense of safety and tranquility. Lisa’s experience is suggestive of ‘place alienation’ that is spilling over into the residential home environment. Amy, Karli and Estelle all mentioned issues that impacted their sense of being at home by undermining ontological security on some level. Amy has mixed feelings about her home, and faces a challenging relationship with her landlord, coupled with dissatisfaction with the quality of her housing. Karli feels at home to a point, but the limitations on personalization within a rental home hinder that to some extent. Estelle does not feel at home at all. She feels “trapped” by her lack of housing choice in the area, has ongoing conflict with her manager, and her apartment is too small for her needs. While Karli’s feelings pertain to the tenure form itself and the

rights therein, Amy and Estelle's situations show evidence of residential alienation on some level. Amy and Estelle's experiences illustrate how ontological security and dwelling are impacted by both the role of the rental and real estate market and the role of the landlord/manager.

The primary variable that determined whether a participant had a positive, negative or mixed opinion about their landlord or property manager was their responsiveness to maintenance and repair issues. Of those who discussed these problems, a third of participants reported that maintenance and repairs were not performed in a reasonable time frame, almost two-thirds described conditions of deferred maintenance, and a third felt that needed repairs were executed inadequately, due to the landlord or manager's desire to save money. The landlord/manager's personality and the tenor of interactions are also a factor for several participants. For example, Patrick described being able to "talk to, and you know, have a conversation with" a previous landlord/manager, whereas his relationship with the current one is contentious and "just ends up in a shouting match."

Housing insecurity is the most prominent feature of residential alienation (Madden & Marcuse, 2018). Just over a third of participants had experienced some kind of direct threat to their continued tenancy or heard about a neighbor experiencing one. Issues with the landlord or manager receiving rent payment (e.g., lost in the mail, claimed 'not received', etc.) were the most common. A few participants have been asked to take a 'buy-out' and leave in the past, and one was recently threatened with eviction after the COVID eviction moratorium ends. This might be expected to result in feelings of precarity, and just over one-third of participants (some of whom were other individuals)

articulated a fear of displacement on some level, ranging from abstract scenario to imminent possibility. These fears are based on 1. contemporary or previous experiences with the landlord or manager, 2. knowledge of the rental housing market, and 3. policy loopholes.²⁵

However, I found that instead of living in perpetual insecurity that undermines at-homeness, many participants deployed coping strategies to manage the risks and establish ontological security. This is not to say that the challenges of these circumstances were negated, but that participants were motivated by their desire to remain in the home environment and found ways to feel at home in spite of them. These coping strategies reveal the ‘hidden power’ of the landlord/manager, as illustrated by situations in which participants modify their behavior to avoid conflict and its unknown potential negative outcomes. This aligns with Byrne & McArdle’s (2020) finding that tenants seek to avoid conflict, both for the possible consequences and associated stress and uncertainty. That this is the case even in a context with tenant protections that are much stronger than most jurisdictions in the United States is certainly noteworthy. Potential conflict disrupts home as ‘haven’ and may lead to conditions of insecure tenure - whether actual or perceived. Accordingly, participants in my study mitigated displacement risk and potential conflict with strategies like taking care of their own maintenance or simply accepting deferred maintenance conditions to remain “invisible” and avoid being a “bother.” Several participants also reported problems as a group to avoid unwanted attention as an individual.

²⁵ Notably ‘crowding’ and unsustainability of rent payments in the long term - two other major components of residential alienation - were not present in this study on a significant level.

The reluctance to be perceived as a ‘difficult tenant’ in the face of the landlord’s hidden power aligns with Hulse et al.’s (2021) findings about use of the avoidance strategy. As in the Australian context, this is strongly connected to Santa Monica’s highly valorized rental housing market, where the stakes are exceptionally high for low-income households, and significant for many middle-income households. Some participants managed fear of displacement due to building sale or the landlord’s potential deployment of policy loopholes with this avoidance strategy. Other coping behaviors include researching the building’s status on the market (e.g., if it is for sale), consulting various sources about one’s rights, adding one’s name to the waiting list for affordable housing, and formulating a contingency plan. These coping behaviors helped these individuals achieve some level of ontological security in the face of perceived challenges to their continued tenure or general unpleasantness around their interactions with the landlord/manager.

About two-thirds of participants reported using some kind of coping strategy. In addition to avoiding the landlord/manager (the most common strategy) due to fear of displacement or conflict, a few participants described how they interpreted the precarity of their situation and made a contingency plan. One participant, who worries that the relationship between her rent and retirement income will not be sustainable over time, simply tries not to think about this upsetting prospect. When she does, she hopes that some of her wealthy friends will be able to help her if needed, or that she will qualify for the POD subsidy program. Another participant, whose building was just sold and has several neighbors who have received ‘cash-for-keys’ offers, feels confident that she will be able to access Community Corporation (income-based) housing if needed, due to the

City's policy to move residents who have been displaced by Ellis Act evictions to the top of the waiting list.

The efficacy of these coping behaviors are examples of Hulse et al.'s (2021) first typology of managing insecurity, where it is in the back of one's mind but they learn to live with it through various means. This contrasts with type two, wherein feelings of 'at-homeness' are critically undermined by constant awareness of precarity. There was no one in my study who fit this latter profile, as the one person who did not feel at home did not actually feel insecure. This suggests that the tenant protections in Santa Monica are mitigating the impact of these residential alienation elements to a significant extent, though not eliminating them altogether.

Place attachment and place alienation

While the importance of time has led some researchers to conclude that depth of attachment corresponds to time spent, others argue that newer residents are also capable of experiencing deep attachments (Trimbach, Fleming & Biedenweg, 2020). I found the latter to be the case in my research, though I would argue that there is variation in the nature of place meanings that corresponds to time spent. When asked to describe a locale, participants whose descriptions included value statements almost exclusively expressed positive attitudes toward their neighborhoods. The city had more mixed results and a higher number of positive attitudes.²⁶ This suggests that people have more intense

²⁶ These attitudes in response to the question "please describe..." are different from the answers participants shared when directly asked what they like best about their neighborhood or city and what could be better about it.

feelings about the city than their neighborhood, which may be due to the city's small size relative to the enormity of the Los Angeles area, or perhaps to its distinctive identity.

All participants in the study expressed some level of attachment to their neighborhood and/or city, even if it was accompanied by critique, frustration or disillusionment. There was no correlation between length of tenure and appreciation for any of the positive aspects of the neighborhood or city. Participants across the tenure length spectrum felt concern about common issues like homelessness, overdevelopment, and high housing costs. However, sentiments about how the city has changed were overwhelmingly negative and were primarily expressed by longtime residents with tenures over 20 years, and a few participants in the 10–20-year range. Likewise, negative attitudes about the city were exclusively expressed by longtime residents, and primarily relate to changes in its physical, sociocultural and socioeconomic character.

The area's recent emergence as a center for the tech industry and its identity as 'Silicon Beach'; the influx of wealthy tech workers; demolition of beloved local institutions; and large new developments were all identified as factors, and were usually perceived to be interconnected. In this sense, many longtime residents feel alienated from the Santa Monica they once knew. Moreover, they feel that City decision-makers orient their plans toward tourists and new residents with money. Due to the importance of narrative memory and biographical associations in the person-place relationship over time, seeing one's home place change - especially in a direction perceived to prioritize 'outsiders' - can evoke feelings of loss, as connections with the past and 'moral ownership' (Zukin, 2014) are gradually eroded. This finding aligns with Tuttle (2021) and Kim's (2021) research on neighborhood change and long-term residents. In

particular, Kim's three typologies of place use/users roughly map onto Santa Monica's long-term renter households, tourists, and tech workers.

In a similar vein, a number of participants across the tenure length spectrum articulated the belief that city decision-makers are either incompetent or beholden to development interests above all else. Traffic, housing costs, and an overemphasis on tourism were frequently attributed to the latter. At the same time, there are a number of participants who believe that elected officials on City Council care about renter priorities and security of tenure. However, even for those who still believe that the City has their best interests at heart, the material reality of conditions like increasing traffic, decreasing housing affordability and unsheltered homelessness may produce a loss of faith in the ability to effectively lead.

These different types of place alienation at the city level align with Manzo's (2003) assertion that the politics of place are essential to an holistic understanding of the person-place relationship. In this sense, place alienation can be understood as an outcome of the ways in which "the places to which we have access, or to which we are denied access, are dictated by a larger political reality" (ibid, p 55). Santa Monica's tenant protections directly grant thousands of households continued access to the city by securing their housing. At the same time, socioeconomic/sociocultural change transforms the built and social environments over time, and elected leaders may fail to adequately respond to quality-of-life issues. The question is, at what point will the benefits no longer outweigh the costs if place alienation increases?

In conclusion, the majority of research on displacement from rental homes focuses on the material consequences of eviction, rather than the emotional impact

(Hulse, et al., 2011). The depth and complexity of the multiscalar attachments outlined above - along with the coping mechanisms tenants employ to mitigate aspects of residential alienation so they can remain in place - underscore the importance of considering this dimension in housing studies. Jim Kemeny's (1992) call for a 'sociology of residence' addresses this knowledge gap by shifting the emphasis of inquiry from the physical structure to the residents' lived experience.

These findings illustrate that places are not interchangeable and have unique value for inhabitants in myriad ways. This is significant in light of economic rhetoric around apartment 'units' and the provision of consumer goods, that portrays rent control as inequitable because it facilitates one household's long term locational tenure over a future consumer (Early, 2000). Potential loss of home not only disrupts ontological security and restricts possible selves, but also jeopardizes attachments to community and place that are the foundation of holistic dwelling. As I have established previously, my study participants overwhelmingly feel at home on multiple scales, though those feelings and attachments are not without attenuations and compensatory behaviors. The next section of the chapter will examine the relationship of tenant protections to those feelings, material outcomes and behaviors.

8.2 Research Question Two

The second research question asks three sub-questions about the nexus between the experiences outlined above and Santa Monica's tenant protection policies, resources and infrastructure. Given that the city is known for its history of grassroots tenant activism and pro-renter politicians (*sociopolitical*), and that it has an extensive suite of

tenant protections relative to other US cities (the *sociolegal* dimension), I expected to find a strong relationship there. This expectation was based on my personal experience growing up in Santa Monica where my dad and many of my friends were renters; my experience living in a rent-controlled apartment in Los Angeles; providing support to renters in crisis in Portland through various avenues; and the literature on ontological security and housing tenure. Through the course of analysis, I also identified other factors of significance (the *landlord/manager* and *the rental and real estate market*). These four elements play a similar role in the residential experience as the four factors in Hulse et al.'s (2011) secure tenure framework .

Does knowledge and/or deployment of protections contribute to a sense of stability and dwelling?

Viewed through the framework of Hulse & Milligan's (2014) tripartite model of security, almost all participants experienced de facto security, based on the fact that there are no imminent threats to their housing. There were two exceptions: one person who is planning to move out of state soon because his income/rent ratio is not sustainable, and one who is being displaced so the new owner's daughter can move in. Just over two-thirds of participants experience perceptual security due to tenant protections (de jure), and to rent control in particular. These participants have had a breadth of experiences with their landlords/managers, ranging from prolonged conflict to no issues whatsoever, and includes the two mentioned above. Fear of building sale was also present even among some participants who feel stable due to tenant protections for the most part, though it was often in the back of one's mind rather than an omnipresent concern. Several

experience perceptual security primarily due to de facto elements of the relationship with their landlord/manager or their income, and secondarily because of policy.

Five experience some level of perceptual insecurity that knowledge of the de jure elements of tenant protections cannot adequately overcome. These perceptions are attributed to knowledge of the rental housing market, policy loopholes and landlord/manager behavior, the importance of which varies with the individual. One newer and relatively young tenant explained that the protections are effective in *theory*, but she wonders how difficult it would be to deploy them in practice. This stemmed from her experience trying to manage a neighbor who was smoking in the common areas. Another participant is concerned that the new owner of her apartment building (apropos of nothing in particular) might evict the tenants.

Three participants who have lived in their homes for decades worry that the landlord/manager can find a way to remove them or “make my life miserable” if they really want to. These three are well-versed in their rights, and two have successfully advocated for themselves in the past with the City’s assistance. Their fears are attributed to their knowledge of the rent gap as a motivating factor for the landlord/manager removing them from their home. Additionally, two of the three have lengthy histories of conflict with their landlords/managers. For one of these participants, the conditions around the relationship with the landlord/manager have resulted in mixed feelings about at-homeness.

The perception of security and how it is informed by the Group One factors is consistent with Cheshire et al.’s (2021) finding that housing “remains embedded within wider social, political and economic relations that stretch beyond it and influence how it

is understood and experienced” (p 133). Accordingly, my findings reveal the limitations of Santa Monica’s tenant protection policies in creating stability (de jure, de facto and perceptual) among residents of Santa Monica’s rent controlled housing. As explained in Chapter Four, there is a wealth of local media coverage about Ellis Act evictions, landlord harassment, and other ways that market actors undermine the intentions of the City’s tenant protections, both legally and extra-legally. Between the media coverage and informal conversations with friends, neighbors, and co-workers, most residents are likely to have an awareness of these practices. Additionally, the *market language* section of Chapter Five illustrates that finding ways to close the rent gap is a common business practice when rent-controlled properties are sold.

At the same time, many participants pursued (often successfully) resolution of conflict through various means. These included contacting a City entity, consulting with an attorney, researching their rights for self-advocacy, or other approaches. This finding illustrates that to a certain extent visible power - which can be observed by examining who is victorious in a dispute - lies more with the tenant than the landlord/manager. It is also worth noting that, for many participants, doing one’s own maintenance or accepting some deferred maintenance (e.g., outdated floor coverings and paint) is viewed as a *reasonable* trade-off for the residential stability that rent controlled housing offers in Santa Monica’s expensive rental market. In these instances, the trade-off was articulated in positive terms rather than as a coping strategy.

The role of sociopolitical dimension was mixed: some participants expressed positive views of local government and its commitment to support renters, while others felt that their priority is development interests and/or attracting high-income renters to the

city. This latter view may be expected to create feelings of precarity. Nonetheless, the policy outcomes of the sociopolitical dynamic over the past four decades have indisputably resulted in real protections and resources for tenants. In this sense, even if one does not perceive local government to be pro-renter, they may have a more positive opinion of the actual policies and of the RCO and RCB, which increases ontological security and perception of stakeholder status.

Lastly, the interpersonal dynamics between landlord/managers and tenants impact the residential experience, which aligns with Byrne & McArdle's (2020) findings. Even some participants who feel very secure due to tenant protections and have successfully advocated for their rights must sometimes continue to navigate contentious situations with difficult landlords/managers. Coping behavior, combined with knowledge and deployment of tenant protections, mitigates the 'perceptual insecurity' created through these conditions. A number of individuals have essentially accepted that downsides like deferred/inadequate maintenance or these difficult relationships are the 'price of admission' for remaining in their home environment. Depending on the situation this may be evidence of the invisible power of the landlord, where the resident appears to be satisfied with conditions that may be objectively evaluated as unsatisfactory. It may also be hidden power, where the resident is unsatisfied but strategically chooses not to report the issue. Or it might be more aligned with constructive coping (Hulse, et al., 2019) where individuals interpret the tradeoff between affordable and stable housing and minimal maintenance as a reasonable one.²⁷

²⁷ Most participants reported that their landlord/manager makes essential repairs, so these conditions are generally more in the aesthetic realm (e.g., floor coverings, fixtures) or general infrastructure (e.g., electric wiring).

Though I had originally conceived of them as being analogous, I learned through the course of my analysis that stability (ontological security) and dwelling are not the same. This is perhaps best illustrated by the one participant who does not feel at home at all, but *does* feel stable in her apartment due to tenant protections. The extent to which knowledge or deployment of the tenant protections contribute to dwelling is more difficult to ascertain with a direct question, which was my approach for understanding perceptions of stability. However, many participants connected dwelling behaviors like community participation and caretaking or renovating the home to the stability conferred by the protections, which will be discussed in the third part of this section. Additionally, those who feel stable because of the protections experience ontological security, which is a foundational element of dwelling. And, to reiterate, dwelling is not necessarily undermined for those who do not feel protected by policy. As detailed above, coping behaviors can mitigate the insecurity created through these conditions. These participants still have strong attachments to their home environments and engage in dwelling behaviors like community participation and home renovations.

Do tenant protections result in material outcomes that contribute to a sense of stability and dwelling?

There is a strong connection between tenant protections, material outcomes, and stability and dwelling, due to the longevity and stability of tenure that rent control enables (with some caveats). This has created a unique context where 25% of the city's pre-1979 multifamily housing is occupied by people who have lived there since before 1999. Half of the participants in my study fall into this category. The high levels of place commitment and attachment exhibited by my participants - even in the face of adversity

and less-than-optimal conditions - illustrate how this policy has continued facilitating access to the home environment in the context of a highly valorized rental market. Half of the participants in my study expressed gratitude at some point in the interview for their rent-controlled apartment and the role it has played in their life. Nearly all of them (with the exception of some of the shorter tenancies) would not be able to afford to live in Santa Monica or even the West Los Angeles area without it. This outcome defies common experiences with private market renting in homeowner societies like the United States, where the tenure is usually characterized by high levels of mobility, insecurity, and other negative outcomes when compared with owning.

In this sense the relative stability afforded by Santa Monica's tenant protections enables renters to become full stakeholders and members of their community if they so choose. This has a number of potential positive outcomes. Longevity of tenure was not only described as a benefit to the participant, but also in the context of creating social stability in the apartment building and neighborhood. As was mentioned previously, the social environment of the building was important to a sense of at-homeness or dwelling for many. The presence of longtime residents in particular was mentioned frequently, as either a positive or neutral feature of the building's social fabric, while two-thirds of the mentions of transience in the building were negative and the remainder were neutral.

Participants often connected negative external factors like the rental market and policy loopholes to the revolving door phenomenon. This aligns with Burrell's (2014) findings on the negative impact of the housing market and attendant turnover in her study of how external contextual factors relate to homemaking practices, and with Rozena and Lees' (2021) findings on the disruptive effects of AirBnB rentals on apartment building

neighbors. Congeniality, trust, exchanging favors and sense of community were all valued by my participants, and consistency in residency was an important part of creating that environment. In this sense the rent control and just-cause eviction components of the City's tenant protections facilitate residential stability and longevity that other residents of the building experience as environmental constancy - one of Dupuis & Thorns' (1998) four dimensions of ontological security in the home.

Whether they result in the experience of perceptual security, experiences successfully resolving conflicts or disputes with landlords/managers by deploying tenant protections support de facto housing stability, and may also mitigate elements of residential alienation like habitation issues. Roughly three-quarters of the 44 conflicts participants described were resolved, with one half of those involving a City entity. Of those that were not, only three of them involved a City entity. These include wrongful eviction, dangerous living conditions, and unlawful rent levels.

Returning to the discussion of landlord power (Chisholm, et al., 2020), this visible power against unethical landlords is also evident in media coverage of lawsuits filed by the City Attorney against landlords who harass or fraudulently evict their tenants. These experiences contrast with Byrne and McArdle's (2020) findings that tenants were overwhelmingly reluctant to advocate for themselves for fear of displacement (legal or extralegal), which was present in my study to a much lesser extent. They point to the ineffective nature of Ireland's recent tenant protections due to landlord noncompliance. Conversely, Santa Monica's resources and enforcement infrastructure provides meaningful support to tenants whose landlords/managers are violating the law.

Are these protections or their outcomes a consideration in behaviors like caretaking and community engagement?

The combination of financial sustainability and housing stability engendered by Santa Monica's tenant protections had a significant impact on many participants' capacity and wellbeing, and by extension, on decisions and behaviors. Caretaking the home was one area where the majority of participants reported considering housing stability and rental value, either consciously or unconsciously in retrospective analysis. While residents are not able to make infrastructure improvements or carry out other major work (e.g., plumbing, electrical), there are some who have engaged in extensive upgrades to their home's interior. Overall, one-third directly connected their decision to invest their own time and resources in maintaining or upgrading the home with the aforementioned outcomes of tenant protections. The majority of these decisions were connected to upgrades, such as buying new appliances, or installing cabinets and countertops. In some cases, this work brings significant added value to the interior of the dwelling, which is a benefit to the landlord when it is rented next. In other cases, the improvements are small - perhaps a nicer faucet or sink - but still ultimately add value.

In addition to these scenarios, there were many other participants who engage in various caretaking practices. While these were not directly connected to policy, they are related to the longevity of tenure it supports, with longtime tenants much more likely to engage in these practices than tenants who have lived in their homes for 20 years or less. As outlined previously, these decisions are a mix of coping behaviors and a trade-off analysis, which vary by participant. Some tenants would rather do their own work, either because they have the skills and it is easier or even enjoyable, or to avoid unwanted

attention from the landlord. There were also several participants who caretake the residence out of necessity because the landlord has proven to be unresponsive or incompetent. A few others appreciated the autonomy from the landlord's supervision and surveillance and did their own maintenance or upgrades to preserve that dynamic.

Tenants who help with maintenance and repairs save money and time for their landlords/managers, and the cumulative value that residents add through their own labor and financial resources has never been evaluated. While it is likely true that many owners of rent-controlled housing do the bare legal minimum legal to maintain their properties (and sometimes less), my findings suggest that the majority of long-term residents of Santa Monica's rent controlled housing view 'bare minimum' maintenance as an acceptable (though sometimes annoying) trade-off for housing stability and continued access to their home environment.

Research on renter non-participation reveals important findings about the role of homeowner priorities and biases in traditional groups like neighborhood associations (Goetz & Sidney, 1994). This was reflected in several participants' experiences with the Wilmont Neighborhood Association, which were attributed to the way in which the neighborhood is sharply bifurcated along socioeconomic and tenure lines by Montana Avenue. Some studies connect community engagement among renters to a desire to improve conditions in the building or neighborhood or prevent displacement (Saegert & Winkel, 1998; Crosby, 2020; Glass, Woldoff & Morrison, 2019). Notably none of the participants in my study volunteer their time with a tenant union, housing justice organization, or neighborhood watch - though several are dues-paying members of SMRR. However, community engagement and participation were common, with over

two thirds of participants reporting some regular volunteer activity. In addition, over a third belong to a city-wide group, and a number are active in neighborhood or Los Angeles-area groups. Some participants are hyper-involved, dedicating their time to multiple organizations on a regular basis, as board members or in other integral roles.

A number of participants connected their decision to invest their time in the community over the years to the stability they have experienced in their homes, and the knowledge that they can participate in the long term if they wish. They represent a range of ages and tenure lengths. In addition to these individuals, other longtime tenants who did not make this explicit connection have been able to participate in various groups over the years due to their longevity of tenure.

Finally, many participants connected tenant protections and the resulting stability with the ability to better plan their lives and make major decisions. For long term tenants who are further along in age, retirement was a common thread. Several participants have already been able to retire or work less due to their housing situation, while another hopes to retire soon assuming her housing situation remains stable. Other participants described how having a secure foundation in their housing stability has played a role or continues to play a role in helping them plan for the future. It has also enabled some to change careers, work less, take a fulfilling but low-paying job, start a small business or attend graduate school. A few participants explained that their housing was not a consideration at the time the decision was made, but upon reflection they identified it as a significant subconscious factor. These findings support the conclusion that tenant protections - when supported and enforced - can cultivate ontological security and facilitate the conceptualization and realization of possible selves.

An individual's life stage also has a bearing on possible selves. The array of positive 'possible selves' becomes more realistic and concrete with age, and feared possible selves for older people tend to focus more on physical and lifestyle aspects than career or relationship (Cross & Markus, 1991). Thus, for the younger participants, the tenure enables them to maintain an expansive view of the future where housing remains a constant rather than an unpredictable variable. None of my participants under 50 expressed a desire to live in their homes forever, but they were appreciative of the material stability and access to their preferred locale for the foreseeable future. Even the participant with the shortest tenure (3 years) expressed this sentiment. Many of the older participants hope to stay in their homes for the rest of their lives, or for some, at least until they can purchase property outside of the metro area or make other arrangements. By enabling early or even timely retirement, their housing serves as a stable base for living a dignified life during these later stages.

8.3 Summary of Research Insights and Their Implications

This dissertation is the first study to examine the lived experiences of residents of rent-controlled housing, and to present findings on some of the policy's positive externalities and on its limitations from that perspective. In a discourse dominated by the discipline of economics it contributes a micro-level inquiry that is critically missing from our understanding of the policy. It also confirms many of the positive outcomes that renter advocates and activists have pointed to for decades.

Santa Monica's rent control as a housing tenure

I theorize that rent control - and Santa Monica's tenant protection landscape more broadly - is a progressive hybrid of legal and social policy. For this reason, I replaced the 'legal' and 'social' dimensions of Hulse et al.'s (2011) secure occupancy framework with *sociolegal*. This reflects the city's unique context as a place where the legal arrangements governing a large segment of its privately owned rental housing stock are guided by progressive principles and activist elected officials. Likewise, the 'sociocultural' element in their framework (which pertains to cultural norms and ideology about renting) was replaced by *sociopolitical*, as the city's political history has been instrumental in shaping cultural ideology around renting. Finally, I added *landlord/manager* to address the role of variation in individual personality and business model. Hulse et al. (2011) attribute landlord/manager behavior to the 'sociocultural' aspect, but that does not hold together in this unique context, given that renting is both normalized and heavily regulated.

For the past four decades, Santa Monica city government has been unapologetically pro-tenant. That stance is illustrated by the City Attorney, Rent Control Board, and City Council's extensive history of action in response to landlord behavior and the landlord lobby's legal threats. Yet, despite these commendable efforts, some tenants in Santa Monica experience housing instability and stress related to landlord/manager behavior, the rental and real estate market, and policy loopholes. This reveals the limitations of a progressive local government's ability to implement redistributive housing policy when actors at the state level have the power to undermine it with legislation like Costa Hawkins and the Ellis Act. The rhetoric of unfairness, battle and burden outlined in Chapter Five illustrates that the same resistance to these policies

exists today that was present in the late 1970s when the initial activism occurred. Certainly, there are landlords who accept rent control as a reality of doing business and are able to work within its confines and remain financially viable while treating their tenants with dignity. But the relentless legal, legislative and discursive attacks signal that the industry as a whole has not accepted the regulations it is bound to operate within.

Viewed through the framework of secure occupancy, these mixed outcomes are still a significant improvement on the experience of renting in the Private Rental Sector (PRS). As Hulse et al. (2011) point out in their analysis of housing systems, “the size, structure and composition of the rental market, which defines the place of renting in a system of housing provision, has many consequential ramifications for secure occupancy” (p 5). In Germany, for example, 60% of households are renters, primarily living in PRS housing, and renting is viewed similarly to owning one’s home. In countries like Germany, the Netherlands and Austria, cultural norms, institutional settings and legal provisions are designed to support long-term renting (both PRS and social) with strong consumer protections. These countries have a “dominant and strongly regulated rental sector that drives provisions for secure occupancy over all or most of the rental system” (ibid, p 6).

However, in homeowner societies like the United States and Australia, where the PRS is the dominant rental sector and is *lightly* regulated, policy is “designed to ensure maximum flexibility for landlords in entry and exit, and in managing their asset unencumbered by tenant conditions that provide secure occupancy for tenants” (ibid, p 6). Meanwhile, social housing is typically heavily stigmatized, underinvested and available only for the lowest-income households (Radford, 2000). Though the PRS tenant

in a homeowner society has some rights as a consumer of a commodity good (e.g., implied warranty of habitability), the property owner's rights to conduct commerce are heavily prioritized.

Santa Monica's rental landscape is a hybrid of these two models. The majority of its rental housing falls under what by national standards would be considered extreme regulation. It also has rental housing built after 1978 but prior to 2004 that is not under the city's rent control law but is protected under the state's much more modest rent increase cap of 5% plus the CPI. There is also a very small stock of income-based housing provided by a mix of actors, including the Community Corporation and private developers. While the residents of Santa Monica's locally regulated rent-controlled housing enjoy many protections and resources, they are critically weakened by the aforementioned factors of policy loopholes at the state level (primarily, with a few exceptions), and the resulting market dynamics, landlord/manager behavior and business practices. Though overturning these harmful policy loopholes would bring increased stability to current residents, it would, unfortunately, not restore housing affordability that has been permanently lost for thousands of residences.

In light of these aspects, I propose that the case of Santa Monica represents a fifth category in Hulse et al.'s (2011) housing system typologies. To illustrate this, tenants in my study had significantly higher rates of feeling at home than the Australian renters in Morris et al.'s (2021) study. While they experienced some of the same problems and used some of the same coping mechanisms as renters in Sydney and Melbourne, tenant protections clearly play a role in mediating those effects, and the local government's commitment to renter households remains exceptional in the American context.

This research also carries implications for our understanding of ontological security and possible selves vis a vis housing tenure. Hackett et al. (2019) found that community land trust (CLT) homeowners experienced ontological security as a result of the tenure and the institutional context of organizational support, which that meant they could spend less time and energy “securing the present, and more time enjoying their lives, or planning and pursuing their future” (p 42). This expansive, forward-looking stance was also present for the vast majority of my participants. Renters - whether in rent controlled housing or not - have significantly less control over their living environment than homeowners. Additionally, they will never be able to recapture the value of their rent paid over the years or improvements they have made to the property when they move out, even as compared to the limited-equity investment a CLT offers. However, the money some of my study participants have been able to save or allocate to various other expenditures *is* a source of wealth and/or capacity building. Additionally, they have been able to realize life goals, work less and make other lifestyle choices that suit their needs.

This contrasts with the devastating effects of foreclosure experienced by many homeowners in the subprime mortgage crisis and ensuing foreclosure epidemic of the early 21st century (Saegert, et al., 2009). While the homeowner ideology positions the owner-occupied house as means of stability, status, and wealth accumulation, traditional homeownership (vs. limited-equity) can put an economically vulnerable household in a more precarious situation than if it continued renting (ibid). As Davis (2012) argues, “the costs and risks of homeownership are almost never discussed by public agencies and the benefits of homeownership as widely articulated are either hard to measure or quickly refuted” (p 1). Because one of the main benefits of ownership is building equity,

households face considerable pressure to allocate resources toward purchasing property. This is intensified by the fact that equity accrual through ownership *is* the primary means of building wealth for Black and low-income households. However, these outcomes can also be thwarted by aspects like predatory lending and depreciating property values, and the rhetoric of ownership does not reflect that reality (ibid).

Accordingly, Hiscock et al. (2001) found that some homeowners in Scotland experience less ontological security than renters in social housing due to the threat of foreclosure. Saegert et al.'s (2009) study on the foreclosure crisis in the United States revealed that even the threat of foreclosure led to depression, fatigue and helplessness, ending marriages, loss of appetite, and in one case, contemplation of suicide. A number of my participants were cognizant of some of the drawbacks of ownership in their analyses of the trade-off between the two tenures, and some do not wish to own property at all. This aligns with Hulse et al.'s (2019) 'deviance' typology, which describes renters who are pushing back against the homeownership norm by making choices that have greater utility. At the same time, many participants under age 50 expressed the hope of eventually owning a home, while acknowledging that there was no clear path to achieving that goal within the area. For these individuals, renting is a means of constructive coping to access their preferred location.

Maintenance and caretaking the home

My findings on the volume of tenant maintenance, repairs and improvements taking place adds nuance to the literature that identifies a causal relationship between rent control and deterioration in housing quality (Sims, 2008; Moon & Stotsky, 1993), and

introduces the element of tenant-added value. Sims (2007) went so far as to claim, “one of the most consistent findings in the empirical rent control literature is the negative effect rent control has on housing maintenance” (p 5). Firstly, this claim is spurious and has been refuted by several scholars (Ambrosius, et al., 2015). Because almost all rent controlled housing in Santa Monica was built over four decades ago at minimum (per the restrictions of Costa Hawkins), it mostly consists of low- or mid-grade properties which may have outdated finishes and some level of deferred maintenance.

This is the case for comparable properties in non-controlled contexts as well (Sung & Bates, 2018). Most landlords are investors, and thus rational economic actors who allocate funds a. when they are legally obligated to do so, b. to preserve the integrity of their investment, or c. to increase returns. There is simply no incentive to make upgrades and non-essential capital improvements without recapturing the investment with commensurate rent increases or “value-added,” as referenced in the *market language* section of Chapter Five. Morris et al. (2021) found similar conditions among PRS renters in Sydney and Melbourne’s non-controlled housing, where a number of respondents reported that their landlords/managers were reluctant to perform maintenance that was unessential and possibly costly to undertake. As in my study, participants interpreted these conditions with a mixture of a trade-off analysis and coping behavior, prioritizing affordable access to their preferred location by making needed repairs or voluntary improvements.

Community benefits of rent control

Finally, my study suggests that rent control confers benefits on the community as a whole (building, block, neighborhood, city), and not just on individual households. Expanding the scope of benefit analysis complicates the claim that rent control confers inequitable welfare benefits to some fortunate households at the expense of others (Gross, 2020). Furthermore, scholars who adopt the misallocation argument (Glaeser & Luttimer, 2003; Bulow & Klemperer, 2012; Skak & Bloze, 2013; Krol & Svorny, 2005) do not consider that the “wrong consumers” have many reasons for remaining in their homes long term (Diamond, et al., 2018). These reasons are multifaceted, and in many cases may have positive spillover effects for other residents of the area.

While there are some aspects for economists to consider in future inquiry (for example, how do lower rent expenditures impact the local economy?), many aspects of value in the person-place relationship are beyond the scope of economic analysis. Findings on the importance of constancy in cultivating ontological security (Hiscock, et al., 2001) dovetail with community attachment theory (Trentelman, 2009; Hummon, 1992), and are exemplified here in my findings on the importance of long-term neighbors and social fabric. Which is to say that the longevity supported by the tenant protections produces conditions of constancy that may benefit neighbors, friends, schools and co-workers *as well as* the actual household. Additionally, renter investments of time, knowledge, finances and other resources in community-based organizations and other volunteer endeavors has an unknown value to the community as a whole. This is facilitated by both longevity/stability of tenure and by increased temporal capacity.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

This dissertation is the first study to examine the lived experience of tenants in rent-controlled housing in the United States. It makes important contributions to our understanding of a policy that continues to be both controversial and in high demand across the country. As I have shown, in Santa Monica the policy and its enforcement mechanisms and resources have a significant positive impact on the lives of the 30 renters I interviewed. These positive outcomes include longevity of tenure far beyond what is typical for renter households in homeowner societies; sense of community within apartment buildings; increased capacity and wellbeing; and generally feeling rooted and at home.

At the same time, the intertwined forces of 1. private-property capitalism and the rental and housing market, and 2. The individual disposition and business model of the landlord/manager have tangible negative impacts on the residential experience that cannot be eliminated by local policy. That this is evident in a municipality with some of the strongest tenant protections in the country illustrates the limitations of redistributive progressive policy within the larger sociopolitical context. The conflict of interest between ‘use value’ and ‘exchange value’ may be mitigated but is ultimately irreconcilable.

9.1: Knowledge Claims and Limitations

As with any methodology or study this research has its limitations. First, because this is a case study and I am interviewing a small group of strategically selected participants, I can only make knowledge claims about what I learn from these specific

individuals. These findings in aggregate are not generalizable to other individuals or contexts in sense that results of a study with an experimental design are. However, by including thick description of the case study site I enable to reader to determine which of the findings might be transferable to other contexts. For example, participants' mostly positive experiences with the Rent Control Office suggest that this type of city bureau – when paired with relevant policy - is an effective way to support tenants.

Second, this study engages participants who self-identify as knowing what rent control is, and that is by no means *all* residents of Santa Monica's rent-controlled housing. This was made evident by the three people who expressed interest in participating and lived in income-based rather than private market housing. Certainly, one could conduct interviews with individuals who do not have that awareness and make connections between protections and some of their experiences, but because I was interested in how that knowledge relates to perceptions and behaviors, it was necessary to make that a criterion for participation.

Third, a 1-2 hour Zoom/phone interview on the topic of feeling at home is a type of participation that is only possible and of interest to a subset of eligible participants. This can be due to scheduling constraints, technology barriers, personality, and/or concerns about anonymity. To this last point, there was one potential participant who withdrew their interest because they were worried that their story would be recognized by their landlord. Due to the length of time that participation entails, and the relatively small incentive (\$15), participants must be motivated by an interest in discussing these topics. That does not mean that they are activists or that they are politically liberal/progressive, but that they have had some kind of experience or reflection that makes participation in

this project appealing. While this is a limitation for generalizability, having participants who have already engaged in some of this reflective work (or who wish to be) can be seen as an asset to the study as they may be more readily able to answer questions.

Fourth, this is not a comparative or multi-case study. I am not comparing the experience of living in this type of housing with that of living in another type of housing. So while I can claim that these findings are true of my participants' experiences, and can support the connection to policy and local context with my other data sources, I cannot claim that someone who owns a house or rents a brand new apartment in Santa Monica has different experiences on the spectrum of dwelling and residential alienation. It is not a matter of "this housing is more x than that housing" but rather these are commonalities shared in the experience of these individuals in this specific situation. I am also not comparing this location with other locations, so I cannot claim that renters in stabilized housing in Santa Monica have different experiences in xyz ways than renters in stabilized housing in West Hollywood. However, by including a rich description of the local context and the boundaries of the study, I enable the reader to determine the transferability of the results to other locales (Shenton, 2003).

Lastly, while it is not necessary to have true demographic representation with such a small group, I tried to reflect the racial and ethnic composition of Santa Monica as much as possible, in addition to age, gender, income and length of tenure. The two areas where this fell short were gender and race. Participants were about three-quarters women, instead of about half. I was also unable to find participants who identify exclusively as Black, rather than mixed-race (of which there were a few). Santa Monica's Black community is a relatively small percentage of the whole population, but the study ideally

would have had at least 2-3 individuals. I did not see any correlation between Latinx identity and experiences (with the exception of place meanings in the Pico Neighborhood), but that may be different for Black renters.

9.2 Future Research Suggestions

This research covers a wide breadth of topics, with an expansive scope to capture a holistic view of the residential experience. The findings point to many topic areas where knowledge can be expanded with further research:

Mixed-methods comparative case study on landlord behavior in Santa

Monica: This study would examine how landlords make decisions about maintenance and repairs, how they manage conflict resolution with tenants, and how their business models factor into these aspects. Ideally it would include at least two cases: one similar to Santa Monica and the other with minimal regulation but a low-vacancy market. In addition to these broad topics, it would also look at possible differences between landlords who manage and/or reside on their property and landlords who do not. This is an area of interest because there were significantly more instances in my study of positive impressions of landlords than of managers. Roughly half the landlords in each category (negative, positive, mixed feelings) also manage their properties. This may suggest a connection between hybrid landlord-managers and positive tenant relationships.

To this point, Wegmann et al. (2017) call for further research about mixed-tenure arrangements, where the landlord of a triplex or fourplex *lives* on site. They cite several Canadian studies from the 1970s that found this arrangement to reduce rent-gouging and landlord-tenant conflict, and connect it to emerging research on ADUs. There are several

directions this research could take, but the inclusion of qualitative methods to capture the complexity and nuance of landlord perceptions and behavior is essential.

Quantitative comparative study on the value renters add to their apartments:

This research interrogates the claim that rent control reduces housing quality, ostensibly at levels not seen in non-controlled locales. Empirical research shows that lower-grade properties with low rents present some of the most attractive investment opportunities. In the United States, NOAH (Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing) is an emergent concept that describes affordable lower-grade multifamily housing with “rental upside potential.” Sung & Bates’ (2017) study on market activity in Portland’s NOAH found that these properties accounted for 91% of total building sales in the metro area and 74% of units sold in the previous decade. Accordingly, as the market value of NOAH properties grew by 78% between 2010-2017 (based on the “rental upside potential”), the average asking rent grew by 43% in the same time period. During this time there were several high-profile cases of entire buildings in Portland with low-income tenants who received substantial rent increases after their buildings were purchased by new owners.

This phenomenon of closing the rent gap through various means is also present in Santa Monica. In both contexts, the landlord’s business model seeks to capture unrealized profits and uses what policies and financing tools are available to do so, occasionally resorting to illegal methods. This proposed study would have two components. It would first examine levels of deferred maintenance among housing stock with the same rating across controlled and non-controlled contexts, through a landlord/management survey or already existing data. It would then survey renters in the same locales to capture data on investments they have made in the home through repairs, maintenance and upgrades. The

results would compare the level of deferred maintenance and habitability issues in both contexts, along with the monetary value of resident improvements.

Mixed-methods study comparing renter and homeowner participation in different policy contexts: This would address a knowledge gap about why (according to the literature) homeowners participate in community-based organizations at greater levels than renters. It would look at motivation, deterrents, level, and frequency of participation. It would also expand the scope from neighborhood associations, voting, and other traditional measures to look at other types of community engagement and participation. The role of 1. stability, 2. accessibility (e.g., meeting times, transit, childcare) and 3. perception of stakeholder status among renters is of particular importance, per previous studies.

Quantitative study on the economic behavior of residents in rent-controlled housing: This research is situated in literature that looks at the welfare benefits of rent control and how they are allocated. It also answers Pastor et al.'s (2018) call for more research that looks at rent control's net impact on business activity, specifically local-serving small businesses. It would extend beyond that specific metric to look at other ways the residents spend income they are able to allocate to expenses other than rent. As my research shows, some individuals choose to work less or make other lifestyle choices instead of saving more money. A possible research question would be, *how do households allocate with the welfare benefit of rent control?* (e.g., save money, spend it on other things, support local small businesses, work less, take a lower-paying job, etc.).

9.3 Policy Recommendations

Despite four decades of proactive, pro-renter policymaking at the local level, loopholes at the state level undermine policy's efficacy, while individual landlord behavior can set tenants on edge with worry about displacement or some other disturbance to their home as a haven. This finding points to larger truths about the implications of the ideology of private property ownership and the way housing is viewed as a commodity. Truly ensuring housing stability, ontological security, and a meaningful reduction in residential alienation requires decommodifying housing altogether. In light of the above, I recommend the following policies.

Change legislation at the state level: As illustrated, the Ellis Act and Costa Hawkins are detrimental to the efficacy of the city's rent control policy, and not surprisingly have similar effects in other California cities (Diamond, et al., 2018). I join City officials, State Legislators, tenants, and tenant advocates in calling for an *immediate* end to the Ellis Act. It is far past time for this flagrantly abused loophole to be closed.²⁸ The vacancy decontrol provision of Costa Hawkins must, at minimum, be modified so landlords cannot raise the rent to market rates upon vacancy. Municipalities should also be able to establish a rolling age criterion for locally controlled housing, similar to the 15 years under state law.

Support for building-wide tenant organizing: Four participants mentioned employing a strategy of collaboration with their neighbors to resolve issues with their landlord/manager. I recommend investing city funds in public education and

²⁸ In the early 2000s The Ellis Act was responsible for the loss of almost 1,000 affordable homes in my neighborhood, at the Lincoln Place Garden Apartments. This included the largest incidence of sheriff lock-out evictions at one location in a single day in Los Angeles history.

programming to train tenants on how to form tenant unions in their buildings and negotiate with their landlords or managers. This would protect some of the more vulnerable long-term, senior and low-income tenants from harassment and retaliation. The Los Angeles Tenants Union does not accept government funding, but the Coalition for Economic Survival might be a partner in this effort. This would empower renters while strengthening building communities and protecting the most vulnerable residents from retaliatory behavior.

Resident advisory council: In addition to collecting data on what tenants are experiencing through the Rent Control Office and the Public Right Division, the City should establish a rotating council of Santa Monica residents who live in rent-controlled housing to advise on policy. This is especially important since there is currently only one renter on City Council. They should meet a minimum of once a month for efficacy.

Establish minimum size, layout and design guidelines for apartments created under the city's inclusionary housing program: Though rent control's detractors are fond of critiquing the policy on the grounds that it cannot create affordable housing, most supporters readily acknowledge that this is out of its scope. Creation of actually affordable housing is a crucial project that must be prioritized in tandem with (not instead of) tenant protections. These guidelines are suggested to address participant reports that the apartments they toured were unreasonably small and had unpleasant layouts, as though they are made from "leftovers" of the building. If affordable housing is just a place to warehouse people, and not a place in which to truly make a home, it is 'alienated housing'.

Update city code with specific life expectancies for items like flooring and paint: This would resolve ambiguity around some of the most common maintenance issues. West Hollywood already has [a list](#) of maintenance standards that prescribe specific landlord actions relative to the age of the item. For example, landlords are required to replace floor and window coverings every seven years and paint every four years in both apartments and common areas. It is somewhat surprising that Santa Monica does not already have these standards. At the same time, there should be some level of flexibility so this is not used as a harassment technique in situations where the tenant would have great difficulty removing their items from the home.

Establish a Proactive Rental Inspection (PRI) program: A number of jurisdictions, including the City of Los Angeles, have PRI programs. These programs entail regularly scheduled inspections of all rental homes, with the instance of inspection increasing when violations are found. While they have their drawbacks (e.g., losing housing that cannot easily be brought up to code), jurisdictions have reported overwhelmingly positive results. In Los Angeles one and a half million habitability violations were corrected between 1998 and 2005, with a resulting estimated \$1.3 billion in reinvestment in the housing stock (Ackerman, Galbreth & Pearson, 2015). In addition to improving the quality of rental housing, is also takes the burden of reporting habitability issues from the tenant, which is crucial to address the landlord's hidden power.

9.4 Concluding remarks

The state and process of dwelling in one's home environment is an essential part

of the human experience. This study shows how housing stability for renters - combined with a living arrangement that supports dwelling by meeting material, social and emotional needs - facilitates positive outcomes for individuals, households and communities. It also makes connections between these desirable outcomes, the sociolegal tenant protection landscape, and the sociopolitical ideology about renting. Given that tenants have been in a position of greater precarity and lower social standing than home and landowners since the earliest days of colonial settlement in the United States, work to improve these outcomes in this locale and others nationwide is considerable and ongoing. Advocates face formidable challenges, including a well-funded real estate and multifamily housing industry that is willing to expend considerable resources to maintain the profitable status quo.

Though this research takes place in a policy context that is uniquely committed to equity for renter households, many of these findings have implications and relevancy for other locales in which the one third of Americans who rent their homes reside. My intention and deepest wish with this work is that tenant activists, when faced with the broad, economics-centered claim that ‘rent control doesn’t work’, can point to this study and the myriad ways in which it illustrates how the policy *does* in fact work. Simultaneously, they can also identify the deleterious effects of the Ellis Act and other loopholes beyond what the quantitative the displacement data (which is also essential). That these outcomes are articulated through concrete examples - rather than in aggregate as in quantitative studies - is key: in order to understand something as complex as the experience of home it is necessary, as phenomenologist Husserl wrote, to go back to ‘the

things themselves'. Centering the voices of renters by creating a platform for them to share their stories answers that call.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment materials and sample interview questions

Email script for tenant interview participants (for service providers, tenant union volunteers, social media page managers, and other gatekeepers):

Dear _____

I'm a renter, tenant organizer, and graduate student originally from Santa Monica and Venice, living in Portland. I'm conducting research for my doctoral dissertation on the experience of living in rent controlled housing in Santa Monica, and am currently looking for interview participants. I am interested in how much residents feel 'at home' in their residences/neighborhoods/communities; and how tenant protections (rent control, code enforcement, eviction moratoriums, anti-harassment law, etc.) relate to those experiences and feelings.

The objective of the research is to 1. shed light on what's working and what isn't, in terms of policy and resources, and 2. to humanize the conversation in housing research by centering the voices of the people who actually live in rental housing. This project is a direct answer to research that crunches numbers to make claims about this type of housing and what is best for the people who live in it, without asking them.

I am looking for people who have had all kinds of experiences (good, bad and in between). There are three prerequisites to participate: 1. the person knows that they live in a rent controlled home, and feels like they know what that means on a basic level. How much or how little they know is not important. 2. The person has lived in their home for at least three years. 3. They are low- or middle-income. The interviews will take place on Zoom and will last about one and a half hours. As a gesture of appreciation, participants will receive a \$15 gift card for a local eatery.

Please share this information with anyone you think may be interested in participating, and let them know they are free to share it as well. The pre-screening questionnaire can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/SMRentControl>, and I can be contacted at Le28@pdx.edu or 310-699-1142 with questions.

Thank you,
Lauren

Social media post/direct mail letter for tenant interview participants

Hello all/Dear resident,

I'm a renter, tenant organizer, and graduate student originally from Santa Monica and Venice, living in Portland. I'm conducting research for my doctoral dissertation on the experience of living in rent controlled housing in Santa Monica, and am currently looking for people to interview. I am interested in how much residents feel 'at home' in their residences/neighborhoods/communities; and how tenant protections (rent control, code

enforcement, eviction moratoriums, anti-harassment law, etc.) relate to those experiences and feelings.

The goal of the research is to 1. shed light on what's working and what isn't, in terms of policy and resources, and 2. to humanize the conversation in housing research by centering the voices of the people who actually live in rental housing. This project is a direct answer to research that crunches numbers to make claims about this housing policy and whether it works or not, without asking tenants about *our* experience.

For the interviews, I am looking for people who have had all kinds of experiences (good, bad and in between). The interviews will take place on Zoom (or by phone if you don't have computer access), and will take about an hour and a half. The criteria are: you have lived in a rent-controlled home for at least 3 years and are low- or moderate-income.

If you are interested in participating please fill out this brief questionnaire*, <https://tinyurl.com/SMRentControl>, and feel free to reach out if you have any questions; Le28@pdx.edu. As a gesture of appreciation, participants will receive a \$15 gift card for a local eatery. Spanish translation is available upon request/

*The questionnaire will a. establish eligibility and b. collect demographic information so I can select participants that represent a breadth of age, length of tenure, and race/ethnicity.

Direct ask via email for tenant interview participants

Dear _____

You were suggested as a potential participant for a project I'm working on (or if I know them, some appropriate introduction specific to our relationship). (If they don't know me) I'm a renter, tenant organizer, and graduate student originally from Santa Monica and Venice, living in Portland. (if they do know me, start here) I'm conducting research for my doctoral dissertation on the experience of living in rent controlled housing in Santa Monica, and am currently looking for people to interview. I am interested in how much residents feel 'at home' in their residences/neighborhoods/communities; and how tenant protections (rent control, code enforcement, eviction moratoriums, anti-harassment law, etc.) relate to those experiences and feelings.

The goal of the research is to 1. shed light on what's working and what isn't, in terms of policy and resources, and 2. to humanize the conversation in housing research by centering the voices of the people who actually live in rental housing. This project is a direct answer to research that crunches numbers to make claims about this housing policy and whether it works or not, without asking tenants about *their* experience.

I wanted to ask if you would be interested in doing an interview? It will take place on Zoom (or by phone if you don't have computer access), and will take about an hour and a half. If you are interested in participating please fill out this brief survey (<https://tinyurl.com/SMRentControl>), and feel free to reach out if you have any questions; Le28@pdx.edu. As a gesture of appreciation, participants will receive a \$15 gift card for a local eatery.

Please also feel free to forward this to anyone else you know who lives in a rent-stabilized home!

Best,
Lauren

(The questionnaire will a. establish eligibility and b. collect demographic information so I can select participants that represent a breadth of age, length of tenure, and race/ethnicity.)

Email for attorney and advocate interview participants

I'm a renter, tenant organizer, and graduate student originally from Santa Monica and Venice, living in Portland. I'm conducting research for my doctoral dissertation on the experience of living in rent stabilized rental housing in Santa Monica, and am currently looking for people to interview. I am interested in how much residents feel 'at home' in their residences/neighborhoods/communities; and how tenant protections (rent stabilization, code enforcement, eviction moratoriums, anti-harassment law, etc.) relate to those experiences and feelings.

The goal of the research is to 1. shed light on what's working and what isn't, in terms of policy and resources, and 2. to humanize the conversation in housing research by centering the voices of the people who actually live in rental housing. This project is a direct answer to research that crunches numbers to make claims about this housing policy and whether it works or not, without asking tenants about *their* experience.

In addition to interviewing 30 renters, I will also be interviewing renter advocates. This will include, attorneys, caseworkers who provide know-your-rights support, and volunteer organizers. These interviews will focus on some of the most common problems you have heard about, the available remedies, and the success of these responses. The interview will take about 30-45 minutes. Please email me if you are interested in participating!

Best,
Lauren

Participant selection email

Thank you for filling out the questionnaire! I would love to set up a time for an interview in the next few weeks. Please visit [this link](#) to find a time, and if you are not able to access it or aren't available in that time frame please let me know.

The interview will be about an hour and a half, although it would be a good idea to set aside two hours just in case, and will take place over Zoom. If you do not have computer access at home or a reliable internet connection there is also a way to call into Zoom with your phone.

Thank you!

Lauren

Scheduling email

Thank you for scheduling your interview! A few things to know/do before we meet:

The audio will be recorded and transcribed, and after the transcript is checked for accuracy the recording will be deleted. The consent document is also attached for your records. There is no need to sign it, but if you have time to read it before our interview that would be helpful, otherwise I will read through it at the beginning. Please feel free to reach out with any questions in the meantime.

There is also a quick photo project in preparation - Please select your three favorite places in your home and take a photo or two of each one. These places can be as small as a shelf or corner and as large as a room, and can be either interiors or exteriors. Don't worry about the quality of the photos. We will look at them together and discuss them during the interview, and they will not be saved as research data. If you are not comfortable with this you may also choose to select three places in advance and describe them in the interview.

Thank you again, and I look forward to virtually meeting you!

Best,

Lauren

Figure 1: Recruitment flyer that was posted around the city in March 2021

Study on Renter Protections

Do you live in rent-controlled housing in Santa Monica?

Are you in a low- or middle-income household?

Have you lived in your home for at least 3 years?

I am a graduate student at Portland State University, and I am looking for interview participants for a student research project about the experience of living in rent-controlled housing. Interviews will be held on Zoom and will last about one and a half hours. We will talk about some of your feelings and experiences in your home, neighborhood and community; your relationship with your landlord or property manager; how much you feel “at home” in your residence; and how these things have changed (if at all) since the pandemic began.

The purpose of this research is 1. to know more about what **is** and **isn't** working as far as different renter protections (like rent control, code enforcement, the eviction moratorium, and more), and 2. to give renters a voice in shaping policy that impacts us!!!



I'm looking for folks who have had **all kinds** of experiences in their housing: good, bad, and mixed. People of all ages, races and ethnicities are important for telling this story, and those who are immigrants or who live in homes with family who are immigrants are especially encouraged to reach out. The study *does not* ask about immigration status. In appreciation for your time, all participants will receive a \$15 gift certificate for a local eatery.

If you are interested in participating please reach out to Le28@pdx.edu with questions, or simply fill out the short pre-screening questionnaire at [\(link\)](#). The study publication will not use your real name, however because you will be talking about your personal story, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

Screening Tool

Do you live in rent-controlled housing (This does not include Section 8, Community Corporation, and other income-based housing*)? (yes/no)

Is your building owned by a family member or close friend?*

Would you say that you know what the rent control does, on a basic level (there is no wrong answer here - it's whatever you think?) (yes/no)

How many years have you lived in your residence? (a minimum of 3 years to participate)

1. 3-5
2. 6-9
3. 10-20
4. 21-30
5. 30+

What is your gender? (open)

What is your age? (open)

What is your race/ethnicity? (open)

Were you born in another country? (yes/no)

Are you a first generation American? (yes/no)

Do you live in a multigenerational household, with a parent or grandparent who was born in another country? (yes/no)

What was your household's annual income in 2019? (Household is everyone you share income with or support - do not include roommates unless you share expenses or support them financially. If you lost employment due to the pandemic please use your income before that. This question is used to determine if you are eligible for the study, and will not be shared.) (open)

What is your name?

What is your email and phone number?

**Added as the study was in-progress.*

Table 1: Research questions and sample interview questions

Research Question	Sample interview questions
<p>1. To what extent do renters experience feeling ‘at home’ (<i>dwelling</i>) or ‘not at home’ (<i>residential alienation</i>), and what factors contribute to those experiences?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Please tell me about your home (e.g. how long have you lived here? What do you like best about it? What would you change?) ● Do you feel ‘at home’ here? Why or why not? ● Please tell me about your relationship with your landlord or property manager. (e.g. have you ever had an issue with them? If so, how did you handle it?) ● Please tell me about your neighborhood/city (same follow-up questions as with the residence) ● Is there a sense of community in your neighborhood? How about in Santa Monica?
<p>1. What is the nexus between those experiences and tenant protections?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Does knowledge and/or deployment of protections contribute to a sense of stability and dwelling? b. Do tenant protections result in material outcomes that contribute to a sense of stability and dwelling? c. Are these protections or their outcomes a consideration in behaviors, such as caretaking the home and community engagement? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Please tell me what you know about your rights as a renter. ● Have you ever had to contact the city, a nonprofit, or some other entity to get information about your rights? Who? ● Does knowing that you have these protections have any impact on how stable you feel in your home? ● If so, how does that factor into decisions you have made, such as changing careers? ● Going back to what we discussed about sense of community, does knowing that you have these protections play a role in that at all? ● How about in deciding to make improvements to and investments in your home?
<p>1. How has this changed since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic?</p>	<p>(Follow-up questions, e.g. “has this changed since the beginning of the pandemic?”)</p>

Appendix B: Tenant education materials

Table 2: Outline of content on the Rent Control website

1. About
 - a. Meet the board
 - b. Agenda, minutes and video archive of board meetings
2. Rent Control Law & Regulations
 - a. Overview
 - b. Summary of Regulations
 - c. Regulations by Subject
 - d. Charter Amendments & Regulations
 - e. Resolutions
3. Information & FAQ's
 - a. Services We Provide
 - b. Information By Subject
 - c. Rent Control Terms & Definitions
 - d. Newsletters
 - e. Seminars
 - f. Also of Interest
4. Rents & Surcharges
 - a. Maximum Lawful Rent
 - b. Look Up A Rent
 - c. Registration Fees
 - d. Surcharges
 - e. General Adjustment
5. Forms & Petitions:
 - a. Apartment Listing Service
 - b. Ownership-Related Forms
 - c. Registering New Tenants and Amenities
 - d. Notice of Annual Rent Increase or Adjustment
 - e. Waivers for Registration Fees and Surcharges
 - f. Petitions
 - g. Exemptions
6. Reports:
 - a. Operating Budget Reports (1979/80 - 20/21)
 - b. Consolidated Annual Report (2012 - 2020)
 - c. Rent Control Board Annual Reports (1989 - 2011)
 - d. The Impact of Market Rate Vacancies (2000 - 2011)
 - e. Annual General Adjustment Reports (2001 - 2012)
7. Other Sites of Interest
 - a. Government
 - b. Community organizations

c. Sites of interest by topic

Table 3: Outline of content of the Public Rights Division website

- a. Tenant harassment
- b. Temporary relocation
- c. Hotels and the 30-day rule
- d. Measure RR:
 - i. Extends ‘just cause’ eviction protections to all tenants in multi-family buildings.
 - ii. Requires landlords to give written notice specifying a reasonable time within which to correct an alleged lease violation, nuisance activity, or denial of lawful access before beginning an eviction
 - iii. Limits landlord’s ability to evict for owner occupancy by forbidding evictions of tenants who are terminally ill or have lived in their apartment for at least five year and are disabled or at least 62 years old. The exception is if the owner occupant is also at least 62 or disabled or terminally ill.
- e. Fair Housing Law
- f. Permanent Relocation:
 - i. Ellis Act removal
 - ii. Landlord or their relative moves into the apartment
 - iii. Landlord seeks to demolish or otherwise remove the unit from rental use
- g. Repair Issues
 - i. Requirements per state law
 - ii. Remedies
- h. Info for Owners
 - i. New owners and prior leases
 - ii. New owner’s notice to tenants (specific requirements)
 - iii. New owners and rent control: If the property is under rent control a new owner must file a Change of Ownership form within 30 days of sale.
 - iv. Tenant buyouts: landlords must provide written notice of tenants’ rights prior to making the offer, which includes the right to rescind the deal for up to 30 days after signing. Buyout agreements must be filed with the Rent Control Board.
 - v. Just-cause evictions
 - vi. Pre-eviction notice
 - vii. Tenant harassment
 - viii. Discrimination

Table 4: Overview of Rent Control newsletter content: Fall 2018 - Spring 2021

1. Fall 2018:

- a. *Market-rate rents still allowed for new tenancies* Provides an overview of rules around rent increases, as well as what forms are required to be provided to tenants at the time of lease signing

- b. *New eviction protection for educators and students* (approved earlier in the year)
- c. Profile on newly-elected RCB member Naomi Sultan and acknowledgement of out-going member Todd Flora's service
- d. *Corporations are not tenants* Overview of recently adopted policy which establishes that rent-controlled apts are only for individual households. Goes back to the 1979 law and its context as justification: "Back in 1979, a "growing shortage of housing units" resulting in a low vacancy rate and rapidly rising rents was a significant part of what prompted the people of Santa Monica to institute rent control. In recent years, the supply of permanent housing has been impacted, as units are rented to corporations or other entities that then sublease them, or rooms within units, for short-term rentals." Likens corporate rental to removing them from rent control.
- e. *Limits on pass-through of property-tax-related surcharges* Overview
- f. Details for a landlord/manager seminar entitled *Owning Rental Property* in Santa Monica, to be held at the library
- g. *Repairs and maintenance* Two paragraphs on this topic and petitioning for rent reductions
- h. The front has a circle to print the individual MAR for each recipient

2. Spring 2019

- a. *Rent Board Amends Rent Decrease Regulations* Updates to how decreases are calculated. They now go into effect prospectively, from the date the petition was filed with the board.
- b. *Highlights of the 2018 Annual Report* Includes statistics on RC housing and an update on the tax pass-through
- c. *Tenant Relocation Benefits Get a Boost* Overview of permanent and temporary relocation benefits.
- d. *New state law expands rights to electric vehicle charging* Tenants in RC housing are now allowed to install EV chargers on properties with five or more parking spaces.
- e. *CPI determines annual rent adjustment* Reminder of how the increase is determined
- f. Side bar with info about two upcoming seminars: tenant seminar and calculating the annual rent increase (for owners and managers)

3. Fall 2019

- a. *Rent Control to launch web portals to its database and document archive*
- b. *POD important program update* Pilot overview and announcement that the city is now taking applications to assist an additional 200 to 400 seniors.
- c. *Keeping in step with new rent control board regulations* Includes a. Expiration of removal permits, b. Updates to calculation of rent decrease (now starts from when petition is filed), and c. rent controlled units must be rented to individuals
- d. Sidebar about upcoming Landlord/Tenant forum

4. Spring 2020 (*First COVID-era newsletter)

- a. *City's eviction moratorium in effect until May 31st - unless extended* Owners are required to give tenants notice of the policy starting April 24. Circumstances include failure to pay rent due to covid, denying entry in certain situations, no-fault evictions (e.g. Ellis), unauthorized pets/occupants,

and some types of nuisance. Notice can be mailed/emailed OR posted on the property.

- b. *We are still here for you!* How to access resources remotely.
- c. *Rent nonpayment survey* (link)
- d. *Frequently asked questions during the public health emergency*
- e. *Healthy living in multifamily housing* Basic overview of covid safety
- f. *Forms & resources* Links to COVID-related information

5. Fall 2020

- a. *City & state extend eviction protections for tenants experiencing COVID-19 financial distress* City of SM extended it to Sept 30 with the repayment period extended to Sept 2021 for any rent not paid during that time.
- b. *New leasing requirement for rental units* The new requirements apply to tenancies beginning after Oct 9, 2020 and include: all residential units must be rented to people not corporations, may only be rented to tenants who intend to use the apt as their primary residence, one year lease minimum, unfurnished.
- c. *Rent Control welcomes returning board members Profiles of Anastasia Foster and Caroline Torosis.* Foster: “Apartments are not just a stopover on the way to somewhere else. Apartments are our homes. Our citizens deserve to be treated with respect, and that’s why I feel so strongly about serving another term on the Rent Control Board.”
- d. *City partners with Straus Institute for free mediation services*
- e. *Annual Landlord-Tenant Forum just around the corner*

6. Spring 2021

- a. *Applications for the California COVID-19 rent relief program are available* Overview
- b. *CA COVID-19 rent relief program basics* Bullet points
- c. Small box with website and phone number to apply
- d. *Financial assistance is available for long-term, low-income senior tenants* Applications for the POD program are now open (provides details an eligibility and application)
- e. Small box with paragraph about buyout agreements and how they must be in writing and filed with the city.
- f. *New regulation clarifies establishment of base rents for new tenancies* At their March 11 meeting the Board clarified that initial rent must be specified as a dollar amount, meaning that landlords who include separate charges for master metered utilities must specify a dollar amount for these charges at the beginning.
- g. *List your vacant units for free!* Info on the city-run listing service.
- h. Sidebar on upcoming virtual seminars

Rent control seminars hosted by the City of Santa Monica

The landlord seminar took place on April 29 and had sixty-five attendees. The presentation outline covered an overview of rent control, registration requirements, the maximum lawful rent, petitions and complaints, evictions (including the California COVID-19 Rent Relief Act), limitations on change of use, and the City's new Rent 20/20 information system. Towards the beginning the speaker announced that the focus would be on the City's rent control law, rather than state law issues like security deposit return and right of entry, or municipal code issues like harassment and code violations. They directed participants to a PDF guide on their website that explains these issues. The rest of the presentation went through the various substantive and procedural aspects of the law, such as limitations on evictions for owner occupancy; when a rent increase is permitted; how amenities become "base" amenities included in the MAR; and Ellis Act regulations. It also included new amendments like the one-year minimum lease period, and a slide with recent data on the effectiveness of mediation petitions. Participant questions were:

1. I have not increased rents in 2020, how do I treat this year's rent increase? Can I catch up?
2. With plumbing issues caused by the tenant, who is responsible?
3. How about the range of decrease amounts? How is that determined?
4. How much time does the owner have to repair the unit once the tenant gives a written notice?
5. Can you evict for the daughter of an owner?
6. What happens if the owner is trying to get estimates on repairs and the tenant is restricting access?
7. Can the tenant ask for a decrease for closed pools and other common areas?
8. What does the law say regarding service and comfort animals?

The renter seminar took place on April 28, 2021 and had forty-nine attendees. It began with a similar overview of the RCA/RCB and the rent control law, and also explained what the RCA does *not* deal with (e.g. harassment, code enforcement, relocation fees). The other topics were determining the lawful rent; unlawful rent increases; amenities, maintenance and rent decreases; eviction protections (including COVID era policy); exemption for owner occupancy; and the Ellis Act. Many of the same presentation slides were used in both seminars, though the landlord presentation had a considerable number of slides that explained technical aspects of paperwork and other requirements that are usually not relevant to tenants. In total, the landlord presentation had 25 more slides than the tenant presentation. Participant questions were:

1. What are some situations where the owner is not charging the MAR?
2. How about the owner collecting the higher rent they didn't charge?
3. What suggestion would you have if the landlords sent a rent increase notice with a mistake?
4. Does parking stay with the unit forever, or can the owner take it away?
5. Is there a regulation on how often an apartment should be painted?
6. Do subtenants have the same rights?

SMRR Newsletters

Santa Monicans for Renters Rights sends its newsletter to members and recently lapsed members (of less than three years) twice a year, with some exceptions. Like the RCA's newsletter, *Renters Write* is four pages long. Generally it focuses more on SMRR's advocacy and policy

accomplishments than the know-your-rights (KYR) content of the RCA's newsletter, though it also includes the occasional KYR piece.

I reviewed the last four newsletters, as provided to me by the organization. An article on the front page of the July 2018 edition makes the case for voting for SMRR-endorsed candidates for City Council, who in the past have "strengthened tenant harassment protections, intervening on landlord attempts to force out long-term renters with lowball 'buy-outs' ... We banned discrimination by source of income and limited evictions of teachers and students during the school year" (Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights, 2018, p 1). The piece lists several other policy accomplishments including the City's strict AirBnB law and the POD program. It also states that SMRR is "pro-resident and slow-growth" (ibid, p 1), and outlines initiatives to curb overdevelopment and traffic. The rest of the issue focuses on the candidate selection process at SMRR's annual convention, a recent Rent Control Board initiative to limit rent surcharges, and a profile about the hotline.

The June 2019 issue features two articles about SMRR's past electoral and policy victories, a timeline of forty years of various tenant protection policies in Santa Monica, a piece on SMRR's education advocacy, and highlights from City Council actions over the years by SMRR-majority Councils (Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights, 2019). The July 2020 issue leads with two articles on the upcoming election and the 2020 SMRR virtual convention. The former includes a pitch for financial support in advance of the campaign. Co-chairs Denny Zane and Mike Soloff make the case for supporting SMRR in the coming election, with overdevelopment as a central concern. They allude to the actions of previous SMRR-endorsed politicians, writing

"...sometimes, people who are elected to the City Council, including some we have previously supported, disappoint us and begin to vote increasingly in support of the objectives of development interests. We do not believe that all development is bad...But some council members seem never to vote "No" on any development..." (Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights, 2020, p 2).

The remainder of the issue includes a one-page article on Santa Monica's eviction moratorium and a short piece on SMRR's work around securing on-going funding for the POD program.

The front page of the May 2021 issue addresses the City's preparation for its 2021-2029 Housing Element. As required by state law, each city must create a plan for how it will ensure the development of both market rate and affordable housing. The article by co-chairs Soloff and Zane characterizes the new state housing targets as "far more aggressive than ever before" (Santa Monicans for Renters' Rights, 2021 p 1). They worry that while market rate housing goals will be easy to meet, affordable housing will be more of a challenge, and that "SMRR's political rivals long have sought to use these state requirement to pressure the city to allow far taller and more dense market-rate development - with just a small share of units set aside in each building for low and moderate income residents" (ibid, p 1). This strategy would entail up-zoning and allowing much taller buildings to be built, which would have a negative effect on the character of the community without much return in terms of housing affordability. The next two pages are a basic overview of tenant protections both before and during COVID, and the last page has a piece on SMRR's advocacy in passing the prohibition on corporate rentals.

Appendix C: The city's tenant harassment ordinance

The harassment law prohibits the following behaviors if they are done with “the intent to harass”:

- Taking away services provided in the lease (such as parking or laundry)
- Entering the apartment without proper notice
- Using lies or intimidation intended to make a tenant move out
- Issuing a “three-day notice” or other eviction notice that’s based on false charges, where the landlord does not intend to take the case to court
- Using fighting words or threatening bodily harm
- Refusing to do repairs that are required by law
- Intentionally disturbing a tenant’s peace and quiet
- Interfering with a tenant’s right to privacy
- Refusing to acknowledge receipt of a lawful rent payment

Tenants who feel they are being harassed may file a complaint with the City Attorney’s office via website or phone. The first step is gathering information, such as a copy of the tenant’s lease and any materials like email, text or photos that are relevant. Someone from the office reviews the complaint, and if it potentially falls under the ordinance an investigator conducts an intake and investigation. If legal research is needed they will often send a letter to the landlord informing them of the complaint, and asking for their position. From this point a number of courses of action are available, including a letter resolution, conference, mediation, a hearing and settlement agreement, or a lawsuit. If a tenant is at risk of losing their housing the PRD will refer them to Legal Aid (Eda Suh, interview 2021).

Appendix D: Selected legal challenges to Santa Monica's rent control law

In 1987 the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear an eight-year-old challenge to rent control, which was financed by the AAGLA on behalf of four landlord plaintiffs at a cost of nearly \$800,000. The suit argued that Santa Monica's rent control law denied owners the right to a fair return on their investments, as guaranteed by the state and federal constitutions. The suit was filed less than 24 hours after voters approved the rent control law in April 1979. Initially several rulings in Superior Court held that different parts of the law were unconstitutional. Then in 1986 a state Court of Appeal overturned the rulings, and shortly thereafter the state Supreme Court rejected the AAGLA's request to hear the case on the grounds that it did not contain a "properly presented federal question".²⁹

Meanwhile the Santa Monica City Council directed the city attorney's office to examine legal strategies to respond to the Ellis Act³⁰, which resulted in four lawsuits to challenge the law.³¹ Its 1986 lawsuit against landlord Henry Yarmark, who was in the process of evicting thirty-five households under the act, argued that the law intruded on its local authority as outlined in the California Constitution. Specifically, that the act does not authorize landlords to evict tenants in violation of local law. The city lost in Superior Court and the state appellate court, with the California Supreme Court declining to hear its appeal. Then in 1989 the California Supreme Court refused to hear the city's appeal of a lower court ruling which stated that landlords do not have to obtain a removal permit from the Rent Control Board to remove property from the rental market.³² Two other lawsuits were filed against groups of apartment owners who purchased buildings and then moved in en masse, converting the buildings into "de facto condos".³³ Carl Lambert of AAA argued that the city "being radical and holier than thou, is trying to block the landlord's right to use his property as he sees fit." Conversely, City Attorney Bob Meyers described the Ellis Act as "an abuse of tenants' rights" and a "state statute bought and paid for by the real estate industry" (ibid). The city lost the other two suits as well.

In early 1989 the city prevailed in federal court against a 93 year old landlady who sought to overturn rent control on the grounds that it was unconstitutional. Her attorneys argued that the law prevented her from evicting a tenant, in violation of the Takings Clause of the Fifth Amendment. However, U.S. District Judge Ronald S.W. Lew wrote in his ruling that there was no evidence the rent control law deprived owners of the use and control of their properties.³⁴ On the occasion of rent control's tenth anniversary several months later the city hosted a celebration in a courtyard at City Hall. Outside landlords protested with signs and chanted "Rent control for the rich! Help the needy, not the greedy!" While a World War II armored car circled City Hall with its turret gun aimed at the building that many protesters referred to as "the Kremlin."³⁵

²⁹ Goldman, J. (1987, Feb 26). High Court's Action Kills Challenge to Rent Control. *Los Angeles Times*.

³⁰ Goldman, J. (1986, Sept 14). City Attorney to Pursue Legal Options Santa Monica Calls for Challenge to Ellis Act. *Los Angeles Times*.

³¹ Wilkinson, T. (1988, Aug 14). Tests of Ellis Act Put Landlords, Tenants on Hold. *Los Angeles Times*.

³² Moran, J. (1989, Aug 13). Santa Monica Renters Face Sharp Rise in Evictions. *Los Angeles Times*.

³³ Wilkinson, T. (1988, Aug 14). Tests of Ellis Act Put Landlords, Tenants on Hold. *Los Angeles Times*.

³⁴ Los Angeles Times. (1989, Feb 25). Local News in Brief Rent Control Wins Round in U.S. Court. *Los Angeles Times*.

³⁵ Wilkinson, T. (1989, April 29). Death Threats and Long Waiting Lists Santa Monica: A House Divided by Rent Control. *Los Angeles Times*.

In 1991 Santa Monica's rent control policy withstood another challenge by the local landlord lobby as a federal court of appeals in San Francisco ruled in favor of the City. Deputy City Attorney Barry Rosenbaum opined that the group was hoping to take advantage of the conservative stift in the courts, with two Reagan appointees out of the three judges hearing the case. In the 3-0 ruling the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals explained that the landlord group's argument about the failings of rent control was misplaced.³⁶

Earlier that year the city won a major case in the California Supreme Court, when the majority decision affirmed the constitutionality of its rent control law. The plaintiff's lawyers, the Pacific Legal Foundation, argued that rent control should be disallowed because it had failed to achieve its purported goal of preserving low-income rental housing. They cited census data that apparently showed a loss of low-income renter households in the city, as compared to an increase in many Southern California cities without the policy. In his majority opinion Judge Stanley Mosk wrote, "the notion that a court may invalidate legislation that it finds, after a trial, to have failed to live up to expectations, is indeed novel".³⁷ Out of fear that such an argument could open the floodgates to lawsuits about a range of other policies, 65 other California cities sided with Santa Monica in court. This high-profile challenge to rent control was hailed as a major victory by tenant advocates (ibid).

³⁶ Los Angeles Times. (1991, June 5). Appeals Court Upholds Rent Control Law. *Los Angeles Times*.

³⁷ Dolan, M. (1999, Jan 5). California and the West; State's High Court Upholds Cities' Rent Control Laws; Judiciary: Ruling in Santa Monica case comes even as new law scales back ordinances in some locales. The decision is seen as a broad victory for municipalities. *Los Angeles Times*.

Appendix E: Multifamily housing market snapshot

Table 5: Multifamily buildings for sale on LoopNet.com, week of August 2nd, 2021

Bldg class	Asking price	“Upside potential” language	# of apartments	# of vacant apts
c	\$15,800,000	“Significant rental upside potential!”	20	9
c	\$7,250,000		11	
c	\$3,500,000	“Value-added component - approximately 36% in rental upside”	8	
c	\$4,598,000	“Meaningful rental upside”	6	100% occupied w/a waiting list
c	\$1,650,000	“Tremendous value add potential - 51% projected upside”	4	
c	\$2,950,000		6	5
c	\$1,799,777		5	
c	\$1,400,000	“Great owner user opportunity - rent control exempt if owner occupied”	3	
c	\$3,250,000		7	
c	\$3,650,000	“45% rental upside potential”	6	
c	\$2,675,000		6	
c	\$3,700,000		6	1
c	\$2,150,000		4	1
b	\$6,000,000	“Presents a significant value-add opportunity to investors, as current rents are approx. 75% below market value...”	12	
c	\$3,400,000	“Presents a significant value-add opportunity to investors, as current rents are approx. 56% below	4	

		market value...		
c	\$2,296,000		5	
c	\$4,985,000	“Redevelopment potential” and “upside potential of 29% in total rental income”	12	5
c	\$5,195,000		7	
c	\$3,800,000		10	
c	\$6,400,000	“This 16 value-add deal has nearly 20% upside in rents, once units are rented for the market.”	16	
c	\$3,489,500		4	1
c	\$3,150,000		4	
c	\$9,250,000		7	
c	\$3,350,000	“This is an excellent corner lot for new multifamily condominium or apartment development opportunity.”	7	