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Walking and biking as queer: deviations, care and resistance negotiating Barcelona's streets

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This paper contributes to expanding our understanding of queer mobilities, studying how LGBTQIA+ community members navigate fear and joy while walking and cycling through Barcelona's still car-dominated streets. It is based on interviews with non-binary people and women (including cisgender, transgender, and intersex) identifying as lesbian, bisexual, or pansexual. The interview included drawing a Relief Map, inviting participants to consider how their multiple identities shape the dis/comfort they feel making different types of journeys.

The resultant analysis maps emotional journeys of walking and biking as queer women, shaped by interlocking experiences of oppression, such as misogyny, lesbophobia, transphobia, and racism. It explores how participants (re)orient urban space to create routes of greater comfort, using strategies of resistance and care. These include spatially rendering invisible dissident identities or making themselves visible in spaces of perceived acceptance by publicly showing affection, for instance.

While the paper, like others on this topic, uncovers experiences of queer disorientation and fear, it also highlights how participants may experience joyful and liberating experiences by disregarding 'straight' paths and creating alternative routes through time and space. Strategies of queer wayfinding and reorientation, rooted in performing gender and sexuality, are usually accompanied by practices of (self-)care and togetherness. They assert queer visibility and insist upon the right to feel comfort.

The paper contributes to enriching queer geographies with an understanding of how queer people navigate cities, often by uncovering new paths and senses of belonging. It also explores imagined directions for a future of queer mobilities which caters for participants' desires and wellbeing.

Keywords: LGBTQIA+; queer; mobility; intersectionality; active travel

Introduction

For LGBTQIA+ people, travelling through a city involves more than just physical movement; it also requires navigating social and emotional landscapes (Weintrob et al.

2021; Edelman 2014). The growing field of queer mobilities has examined challenges that LGBTQIA+ people experience when travelling (Shakibaei and Vorobjovas-Pinta 2022; Lubitow, Abelson, and Carpenter 2020). Yet, as Munt (1995) argues in her essay on the lesbian flâneur, for queer individuals, the streets are not only spaces of violence but also of freedom. This is reflected in a trans woman's testimony in Smith's study (2023) describing her bicycle as 'liberation'. Taking to the streets can evoke both the risk of harassment and the opportunity for reclaiming space (Koskela 1997).

With this paper, we seek to contribute to the field of queer geographies through the study of lived mobility experiences. We draw on Ahmed's (2006) concept of orientation to explore how power structures influence queer people's mobility, shaping their wayfinding and comfort. Our main objective is to analyse how intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and age shape queer movement through Barcelona, a city that like others has been planned around car travel for many years. This allows us to draw on queer mobilities to inform discussions around queer urban and transport planning.

Our analysis is based on a mixed-methods approach that combines interviews with Relief Maps. Hence, this paper also addresses calls to incorporate an intersectional perspective into geography (Rodó-de-Zárate and Baylina 2018; Oswin 2008) and mobility studies (Ravensbergen, Buliung, and Laliberté 2019). With our findings, we aim to move beyond framing queer mobilities solely as experiences of fear, as this focus could imply that being queer is inherently linked to violence (Blatt 2022; Snorton and Haritaworn 2022) or that queer visibility is always dangerous (Harris and Holman Jones 2017). While we do explore queer discomfort, we also examine how queer mobilities challenge normativity.

This idea connects to Giesecking's (2020) work on queer geography, which illustrates how LGBTQ+ people create mental maps of cities, viewing these spaces as

1 constellations that reflect their relationships to place-making and visibility. By bridging
2 Ahmed's (2006) and Gieseeking's (2020) work, we focus on disorientations and
3 reorientations not only as deviations from the 'straight' path, but also as strategies to pave
4 routes of comfort. One specific interest is whether and how queer mobilities reorient the
5 urban space through strategies of resistance and care. Building on Foucault's (1978)
6 concept of self-care, we suggest that taking care of oneself or a loved one may allow
7 queer people to decide how and when to perform their sexuality in hostile landscapes
8 (Stasińska 2022).

9 **Queer mobilities: (dis)orientations and deviations**

10 Black queer geographies have delved into how race, class and gender, including
11 binaries and the cis-norm, influence sexuality and urban placemaking (Bailey and
12 Shabazz 2014). This corpus, grounded in Crenshaw's (1991) theory of intersectionality,
13 conceptualised that intertwined power structures combine to shape spaces, leaving no
14 room for certain bodies. These studies reveal that the juxtaposition of racism, homophobia
15 and transphobia excludes queer black and brown people from public space, planning
16 processes and urban politics (Isoke 2014; Irazábal and Huerta 2016), highlighting the
17 complicity of liberal LGBT politics with racism (Snorton and Haritaworn 2022; Puar
18 2007). Building on Ahmed (2006) work, this exclusion establishes well-trodden paths in
19 the city, which are 'in line' with those who conform to norms. In dialogue with Butler
20 (2006), Ahmed argues that paths are performative in the sense that they rely upon the
21 repetition of social conventions, routes already taken.

22 Expanding on this, Ahmed's (2006) concept of 'orientations' explores how bodies
23 are directed in certain ways by societal norms, and how these orientations shape our
24 experiences of space, relationships, and identity. Her focus on queer orientations can be
25 extended to queer mobilities: the ways in which racialized, gendered and aged

1 LGBTQIA+ people navigate cities, often through circuits that diverge from the ‘straight’
2 lines of heteronormativity (Weintrob et al. 2021).

3 For queer people, the city is often experienced as disorienting. Queer mobility
4 studies have emphasised how discrimination shape the travel patterns of queer people
5 (Weintrob et al. 2021; Lubitow, Abelson, and Carpenter 2020; Edelman 2014; Shakibaei
6 and Vorobjovas-Pinta 2022). When feeling ‘off course’, limiting affectionate gestures in
7 public might be a lifeline for some queer people (Jubany, Langerita Adiego, and Mas
8 Grau 2022; Giesecking 2020). This generates ‘systemic’ discomforts, whether dissident
9 social positions are explicitly visible or not (Rodó-de-Zárate 2017). However, it is worth
10 noting that becoming visible in public space entails not only exposure to violence from a
11 hegemonic culture but also asserting one's identity and being seen by the subjects of one's
12 desires (Kemmer et al. 2022). This is reflected in a lesbian's testimony from 1950s
13 Barcelona recalling how she was firstly introduced to other lesbians: ‘Walking down
14 Paral·lel Ave., she crossed paths with Tina, she looked at her in a special way. “I knew it
15 immediately, even though she was the first lesbian I had ever met”’ (Albarracín Soto
16 2008, p.195).

17 Resonating with key aspects of queer mobilities, Ahmed (2000) suggests that
18 spaces tend to be claimed by moving within rather than inhabiting them. Disorientations,
19 feelings of being ‘out of place’, offer potential for resistance and transformation (Ahmed
20 2006). Following lines of desire implies moments of disorientation and reorientation that
21 disregard ‘straight’ paths while creating alternative routes not only through space, but
22 also time. Queer time and utopia are presented as a vision of hope, where queerness
23 disrupts linear conceptions of time to imagine futures beyond heteronormativity (Muñoz
24 2009). These spatial and temporal lines of desire resonate with Giesecking's (2020)

conceptualisation of constellations. In creating their own maps, LGBTQIA+ people reoriented the city toward their own needs, paving new routes that defy normativity.

Queering walking and cycling in Barcelona

This study was conducted in Barcelona, Spain, on the northwest coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The city, perceived as a place of comfort for the LGBTQ+ community, is an ideal setting to deepen our understanding of the mobility habits of city-dwellers, including those who relocated seeking acceptance (Jubany, Langarita Adiego, and Mas Grau 2022). With 14% of adults identifying as LGBTQIA+ (the European average is 9%), Spain has a relatively high share of openly queer people (Ipsos 2023). Hence, the study offers the potential to explore nuances in queer wayfinding, allowing us to analyse joyful and fearful spaces, and how they are inter-related.

Barcelona has a compact, diverse urban environment and a fairly extensive network of cycling paths (270 km in 2024). Nonetheless, the city has been directed by decades of car-centric urban planning. Barcelona's motonormativity (Walker, Tapp, and Davis 2023), i.e. societal privileging of driving, is entangled with other social hierarchies, including those of capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism (Cubells, Miralles-Guasch, and Marquet 2024). Recent years have seen expansions of Barcelona's walking and cycling infrastructure, although urban reorientations that question motonormativity have been highly contested in the city (Zografos et al. 2020). Since we focus on walking and biking, we set this study in a context where queer people navigate the city in ways that deviate from (moto)normativity.

While frequently treated together, walking and cycling are distinct forms of mobility, each shaped contextually (Cook et al. 2022) and producing differentiated experiences of (dis)comfort for different users. Though distinct in aspects like speed,

1 provision and use of infrastructure, walking and biking share embodied spatial practices
2 and rhythms (Brown 2012) while permitting and necessitating more exposure to
3 surroundings and communities than does car travel (Springgay and Truman 2017). Public
4 transit offers mixed experiences, where bodies are still exposed to others but in a more
5 structured space (Kemmer et al. 2022). Compared to transit, walking and biking afford
6 individuals greater control over their movement, allowing them to individually curate
7 their route, pace, and pauses. This control offers users more autonomy to reorient
8 themselves toward comfort while disorienting space (moto)normativity.

9 While walking represents about two thirds of all the trips undertaken within
10 Barcelona (IERMB 2021), it is often described as an ‘invisible mode’ (Pooley et al. 2014).
11 Nonetheless, walking is widespread among both residents, and the many tourists who
12 predominantly visit the city centre. The presence of tourists, read as heterosexual, and
13 amenities that cater to them not only change residents’ modes of walking by slowing and
14 interrupting their rhythms (Svensson 2021), but also transforms and disrupts the everyday
15 lives of queer people and spaces (Rushbrook 2002).

16 Cycling, in contrast, only represents 3% of trips undertaken in Barcelona (IERMB
17 2021). Cyclists often face the pressures of navigating traffic despite the existence of a
18 partial network of cycling paths, having to orient toward the speed and rules of a car-
19 centric urban system where they experience moments of vulnerability (Balkmar 2018).
20 Though cyclists can move quickly through the city, women and non-binary cyclists
21 repeatedly encounter harassment (Col·lectiu Punt 6 2021), pushing them ‘off course’ or
22 to ‘take the lane’ mirroring performative masculinity (Sersli et al. 2022). This is further
23 aggravated by the fact that, like in many emerging cycling cultures, three-quarters of
24 Barcelona’s cyclists are men (Lind, Honey-Roses, and Corbera 2021), likely reproducing

a cycling culture more associated with risk, speed, and masculinity (Goel et al. 2022; Sillero Casado 2022).

For queer people, walking and cycling can enable reorientations that subvert space normativity while taking care of each other. For instance, Spain's first demonstration for LGBTQIA+ rights was in Barcelona in 1977 and involved walking together. This march triggered the decriminalization of queer presence in public spaces (Pineda 2008). Queer activist Ocaña tested these new laws by walking down la Rambla cross-dressed, transforming the act of walking into a political performance that subverted space normativity and asserted queer visibility (Rodríguez-Solás 2018). This strategy exemplifies how performing gender and sexuality, drawing from Butler's (2006) theory of performativity, enables to trailblaze paths of comfort. Cycling events like women's only rides in cities worldwide, including Barcelona, may similarly highlight the power of coming together to reclaim the streets (Heim LaFrombois 2019; Sillero Casado 2022).

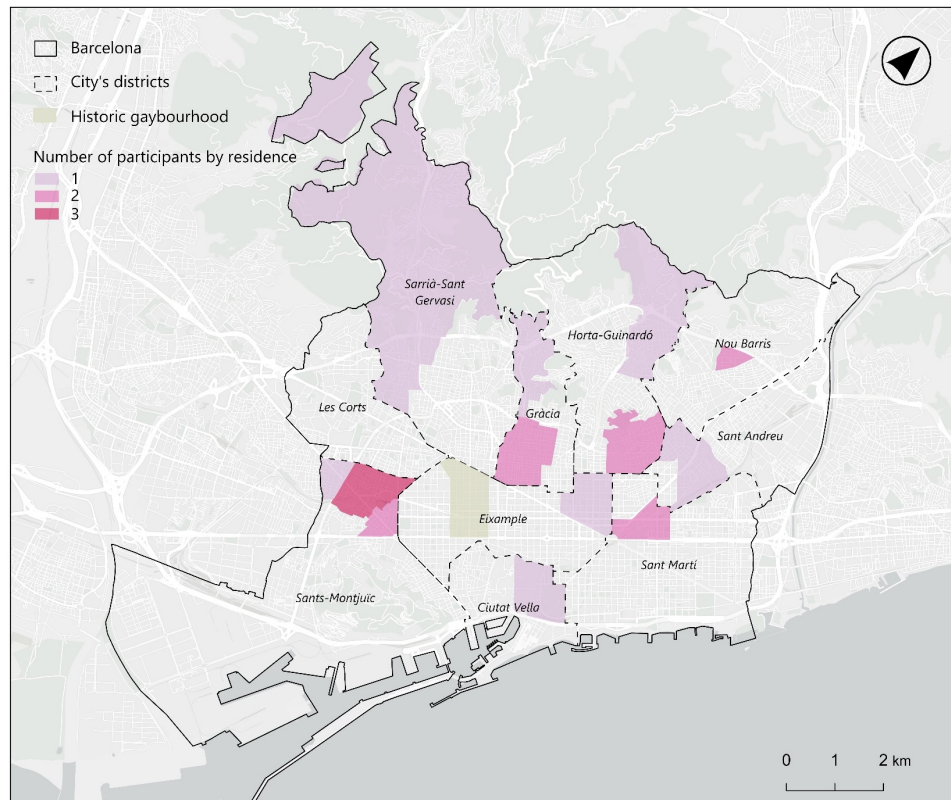
Spatial reorientations that bring people together can generate feelings of belonging and acceptance (Stella 2012; Preser 2021), whether or not they were intended as explicit political actions towards this goal (Moreira 2020; Kemmer et al. 2022). Witnessing or knowing of other queers' visibility, such as LGBTQIA+ couples walking holding hands, can bring feelings of comfort while opening up new ways of possibility (Bailey 2014; Ferreira and Salvador 2015; Langarita Adiego 2020, Rodó-De-Zárate 2017). While the right to feel comfort is never guaranteed, individuals can performatively exercise it even in its absence (Butler 2009).

Methods

Study participants were recruited through a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. We contacted a dozen organizations that advocate for women's and

LGBTQIA+ rights in tandem with other intersections such as young or old age, refugee status, motherhood, or cycling activism. We sent these associations a call, outlining the research objectives, and asking them to share the information with their network. Although attempting to ensure a diverse sample, we lacked responses from queer youth, older adults, or people with mobility disabilities, among others.

In July 2023, the lead author conducted 20 semi-structured interviews in Catalan and Spanish, 18 of which took place individually, and 2 in couples (Figure 1). Interviews were held in person in places chosen by participants, such as their homes, community centres, parks, or cafeterias. Interviews were audio-recorded and lasted an average of 45 minutes. In terms of gender, 3 participants identified as non-binary, 16 as cisgender women, 2 as transgender women and 1 as an intersex woman. Regarding sexuality, interviewees labelled themselves as lesbians, bisexuals, pansexuals, and queer. Half grew up in Catalonia, and the rest relocated from other regions of Spain (n=2), Europe (n=2) or North and South America (n=7). Sixteen of them described themselves as white(-passing) Europeans, Latinxs or Gypsies and six as black and brown Latinx. Participants ages ranged from 19 to 48 years and two shared that they were mothers. Half of the interviewees reported they cycled weekly, and all walked regularly. Participants received 30€ to compensate them for their time and experience. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee on Animal and Human Experimentation at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (CEEAH 6489).



2 Figure 1. Participants' residence across Barcelona.

3 In the interviews, participants talked us through their experiences during daily
 4 active travel trips, both walking and cycling. For each trip mentioned by the participant,
 5 we asked them to break down their feelings regarding distinct social positions, such as
 6 gender, sexuality, age, and race. Following Rodó-de-Zárate's (2014) methodology, we
 7 questioned whether participants thought they would feel the same had they been
 8 inhabiting a more privileged identity as a man, heterosexual, younger, etc. The purpose
 9 of these questions is not to frame experiences in binary terms but to encourage
 10 participants to reflect about them in relation to an identity they do not embody and might
 11 place differently in spatial power hierarchies.

12 After the interview, participants were asked to draw a Relief Map. A detailed
 13 guide to the use of Relief Maps is provided in Rodó-de-Zárate (2014). This tool illustrates
 14 and analyses power structures in relation to experience and place. In this study, Relief

1 Maps picture the experience of sexuality, gender, race, and age in each trip from an
2 intersectional perspective. Trips were analysed individually, considering the route, the
3 time of day, mode of transportation, and companions. Until now, Relief Maps have been
4 used to study static spaces, hence adding movement through the study of routes provides
5 an innovative approach to this methodology.

6 Figure 2 provides an example of our use of Relief Maps. First, interviewees were
7 asked to order trips discussed during the interview on the x-axis. They were requested to
8 draw a dot that reflected their level of comfort, represented on the y-axis, for each trip
9 and identity. In Figure 2, the participant classified walking to the university as her trip of
10 oppression, identifying high discomfort due to her gender and sexuality and low
11 discomfort due to her age and race. Finally, interviewees were asked to link dots
12 representing the same identity and add arrows between identities, illustrating the
13 intertwined experience of social positions. Figure 2 includes an arrow between gender
14 and sexual orientation, indicating that the interviewee feels discomfort during that trip
15 due to being both a woman and a lesbian.



Figure 2. Adela's Relief Map, a white lesbian cisgender woman in her twenties. Trip names were anonymised.

All interviews were transcribed, and an inductive data analysis approach was followed. An initial review of transcripts was conducted to construct a conceptual framework of factors affecting (dis)comfort while travelling and strategies to negotiate them. Atlas.ti software was used to systematically code data into thematic groups, using categories identified in the initial conceptual framework but also incorporating newly identified categories. Examples of codes include 'race and (dis)comfort', 'policing queerness' or 'showing affection'. This led us to modify the conceptual framework by adding new codes, which were then compared across interviewees to better capture different experiences. Thematic coding was analysed together with Relief Maps and all participants were given pseudonyms.

Results and discussion

The following sections discuss queer wayfinding through routes of discomfort and comfort. We find that queer mobilities are shaped by the intertwined combination of gender, sexuality, race, and age of each participant, although we acknowledge the limitations of breaking down such experiences as intersectional identities are embodied simultaneously. The next subsections are dedicated to walking while the third one focuses on cycling in a context of contested motonormativity. While in these subsections we examine experiences of disorientation and reorientation through space, we also discuss queer mobilities directions in time. Hence, the last subsection explores how active mobilities might queer cities to improve the well-being of LGBTQIA+ communities.

1 ***‘I wear sportswear like an armour’: walking through discomfort***

2 This section reflects upon participants’ feelings of being ‘out of place’ when walking.
3 Here, disorientations surface from having to navigate through paths that are invisible, that
4 have been erased, but also those that have been paved to feel seen, as disciplinary walks
5 of shame.

6 When walking alone, most participants with a gender expression regarded as
7 normatively feminine believe themselves to be read as heterosexual, as someone who
8 follows the ‘straight’ path. In this regard, Berta comments on her experience compared
9 to her girlfriend’s:

10 Even though I’m a lesbian, I feel like I’m read as heterosexual, an object of desire,
11 and therefore, less penalized than her [partner], as she doesn’t conform to any of the
12 norms of femininity. I think a butch can face discrimination for not being feminine
13 enough. I can face it the moment I’m read as straight.

14 Berta’s nonrecognition as a lesbian in the public space is similar to those of many
15 women with dissident sexualities (Stella 2012; Ferreira and Salvador 2015).
16 Heteronormative assumptions rooted in compulsory heterosexuality fail to recognise
17 sexual diversity of passersby other than stereotypical forms of lesbian performativity
18 (Olasik 2015). This renders invisible queer mobilities and erases ramifications from the
19 normative path, maintaining heteronormativity in public space (Rodó-de-Zárate 2015).
20 Further, the frequent misrecognition of queer women’s sexual identities shows the
21 instability of categories related to sexuality and that such identities are *done* through a set
22 of practices (Butler 2004).

23 Having her lesbian identity knocked ‘off course’, she is perceived as ‘an object of
24 desire’ by heterosexual men and faces misogyny like any heterosexual woman (Hanson
25 2010). In this disorientation, her concern focusing on the risks associated with a
26 heterosexualised male gaze when walking, rather than a homophobic gaze, is in line with

the experience of other queer women mostly preoccupied with managing harassment associated with the heterosexualised male gaze (Nicholls 2017).

Rather than performing femininity, performing a more normatively masculine gender expression may allow queer women to disorient the heterosexual male gaze and reduce their distress (Rodó-de-Zárate 2015). This is expressed in Clara’s words when discussing her gender presentation during a night walk:

When I’m wearing loose shirts and baggy pants, no one looks at me, and it’s much more comfortable. I used to have short hair, and I felt much safer because many times they confused me with a boy. So, I would put on a hoodie or something like that, and they barely noticed me.

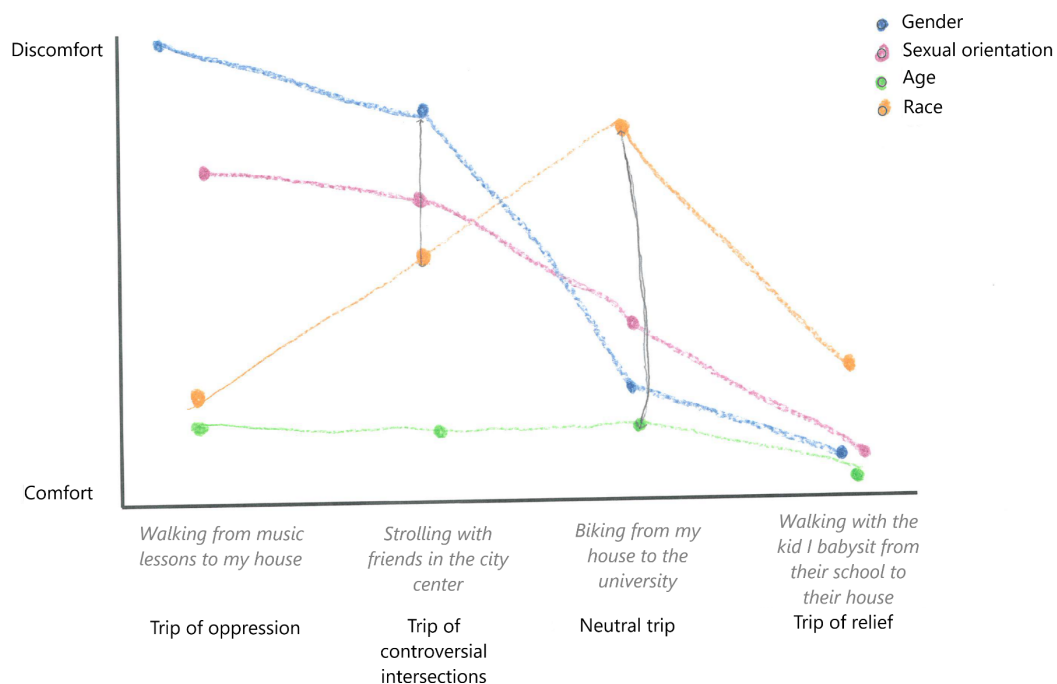


Figure 3. Relief map of Clara, a Latinx lesbian cisgender woman in her twenties.

Dialling down her visibility constitutes a self-care act that Clara puts into practice on her way home from evening music lessons, where she draws a poignant discomfort due to her gender identity (Figure 3). Performing masculinity helps her relieve such

1 discomforts, but it is worth noting that this tactic is spatially situated in that solo trip,
2 where she feels the highest distress. This strategy does not erase the discomfort she feels
3 due to her gender as it might remind her of her gendered experience and the need to put
4 into practice a gender performance different to the one when she cycles or walks
5 accompanied.

6 The strategy of performing gender in search of comfort is shared by Elisabet when
7 she walks alone to run errands in her neighbourhood. For Elisabet, ‘wear[ing] sportswear
8 like an armour’ allows her to deviate from misogyny and transphobia:

9 I can’t pass [as cisgender], no matter how I dress. I think that if I started wearing
10 dresses, people would say that I’m a transvestite. I mean, I wear sportswear like an
11 armour, right? I believe that if I had a more traditionally feminine appearance, I
12 would lose this protection, and I’ve already experienced what happens when you
13 lose it.

14 Elisabet’s safety coping strategy through gender performance and a heightened
15 sense of alertness is similar to those found in studies of transgender women using public
16 transit (Lubitow, Abelson, and Carpenter 2020; Weintrob et al. 2021; Shakibaei and
17 Vorobjovas-Pinta 2022). Elisabet’s testimony also evidences disparities in experiences of
18 harassment between queer cisgender and transgender women (Devís-Devís et al. 2022).

19 Noteworthy, the fact that their gender performance renders them invisible allows
20 them to navigate the space unrestrictedly. Both testimonies evoke the figure of the lesbian
21 flâneur, akin George Sand's butch drag walks. Like Sand, who claimed ‘no one knew me,
22 no one looked at me’ (quoted in Munt 1995), the lesbian flâneur symbolises someone
23 both unseen and independent wandering through the streets, a paradoxical place of
24 freedom and violence (Koskela 1997). For Clara and Elisabet, following the path of
25 performative masculinity constitutes both the ‘lifeline’ to navigate the streets unbothered

1 and the ‘lifeline’ to get out of unliveable paths (Ahmed 2006). Therefore, this strategy
2 may constitute an act of self-care to ensure momentary well-being (Stasińska 2022).

3 Compared to walking alone, walking with a partner is a ‘turning’ point that takes
4 queer people to different directions than those of erasure and invisibility. Most informants
5 said public displays of affection during their trips frequently draw unsolicited attention.
6 Laura illustrates how walking with her ex-girlfriend made it much more likely that
7 passersby would ‘turn’ to look at them:

8 When you’re with a man, you’re there safely, no one looks at you, you go unnoticed.
9 And when you go out with a girl, it’s different. I mean, if they already look at me
10 when I’m alone, with her, it was even much more constant.

11 Queer coupledness may attract unwanted public scrutiny (Preser 2021; Stella 2012)
12 accompanied by feelings of discomfort (Rodó-De-Zárate 2017). Recalling her night
13 walks with her dates, Vera adds that the orientation toward queer bodies often turns into
14 sexualisation:

15 It becomes a fetish; I think this happens to all of us. As soon as you reveal that ‘yes,
16 I do indeed like women,’ some men are like ‘wow, possibility of a threesome
17 unlocked.’ Ugh, this is constant.

18 The fetishisation of queer women’s relationships and spaces is well-documented
19 (Lane 2015; Preser 2021). Both participants agree that their gendered and sexualised
20 experience of mobility is intensified by their racialised identity. This is in line with the
21 intensification thesis, according to which a social position in one power structure
22 (colonialism) intensifies the oppression of a different power structure (heteropatriarchy)
23 (Rodó-de-Zárate 2014). Concerns over hypervisibility and sexualisation lead some
24 informants to lose their way, which has direct implications on queer mobility patterns,
25 influencing route choice or even prompting them to avoid certain areas.

1 ***‘You don’t have to pretend, you already are’: finding a way to comfort***

2 Beyond the above routes of discomfort, participants report also ways to comfort in routes
3 where (self-)care is mobilised to take the path of dissident identities, the one that
4 politically challenge the status quo. In this section we explore queer wayfinding through
5 the city and how it simultaneously queers the city, as we consider routes, which exist
6 through repetition of practices, as performative (Ahmed 2006). That is, for instance, the
7 experience of Olivia when walking to the university. In her case, increasing her visibility
8 through gender performance brings her comfort.

9 [If I presented myself more masculine] I would feel a lot worse because I would
10 experience dysphoria, but it [the response] would be the opposite. People would look
11 at me less, but I wouldn’t be truthful to my identity.

12 Olivia is aware that her gender performance diverges from the ‘straight’ route,
13 but in the subsequent tension between conforming to cisnormativity and visibility, finds
14 more comfort in visibility. Butler (2004, p.217) addresses this dichotomy and concludes
15 that ‘[W]hen the norm appears at once to guarantee and threaten social survival (it is what
16 you need to live; it is that which, if you live it, will threaten to efface you), then
17 conforming and resisting become a compounded and paradoxical relation to the norm, a
18 form of suffering and a potential site for politicization.’

19 Olivia further illustrates this in her account of a sexual assault in one of her
20 walking trips, which transformed here relationship with space over time, and how she
21 reconciled with it:

22 I didn’t want to set foot in that neighbourhood. But little by little, I told myself ‘you
23 deserve this space, it’s as much yours as anyone else’s, this won’t happen again’.
24 And that was a turning point. Because now I know how I feel, now I know I’m
25 strong, and if I walk down this street again, I can confront it. I think many queer
26 people have experienced this, that they hate us, and out of that hate, they’ve raped

1 us, harassed us... and nobody has spoken up. I would like to use my voice so that
2 more people speak up and are able to say, 'there are many of us, and we're capable
3 of stopping this'. We're going to win against hate.

4 Olivia went through a moment of disorientation and displacement at the
5 beginning, i.e. refusing to 'set foot in that neighbourhood', but dealt with it by reorienting
6 herself and asserting her presence in that path. This experience goes beyond the account
7 of 'a form of suffering' and mirrors Butler's (2004) potential site for politicisation, in this
8 case, through queer mobilities. Olivia strolls around that neighbourhood weekly and says
9 that she feels 'good' and 'powerful' doing so, surrounded by her queer friends. Queer
10 friendship is regarded as a form of care and social resistance to normative expectations
11 (Moreira 2020). This is in line with Weintrob et al. (2021) finding that transgender people
12 may prefer to travel in groups, as togetherness provides feelings of comfort (Sandberg
13 and Coe 2020). These feelings represent a downward slope in her Relief Map, in which
14 she locates this trip on the right side (Figure 4). Similarly, Clara's map shows how
15 discomforts due to her gender and sexuality are relieved when strolling with friends
16 through the same streets as her trip of oppression (Figure 3). However, the discomfort
17 perceived due to her race spikes because of the increased visibility of being accompanied
18 by a group of non-white people (c.f. Osei and Aldred 2023).

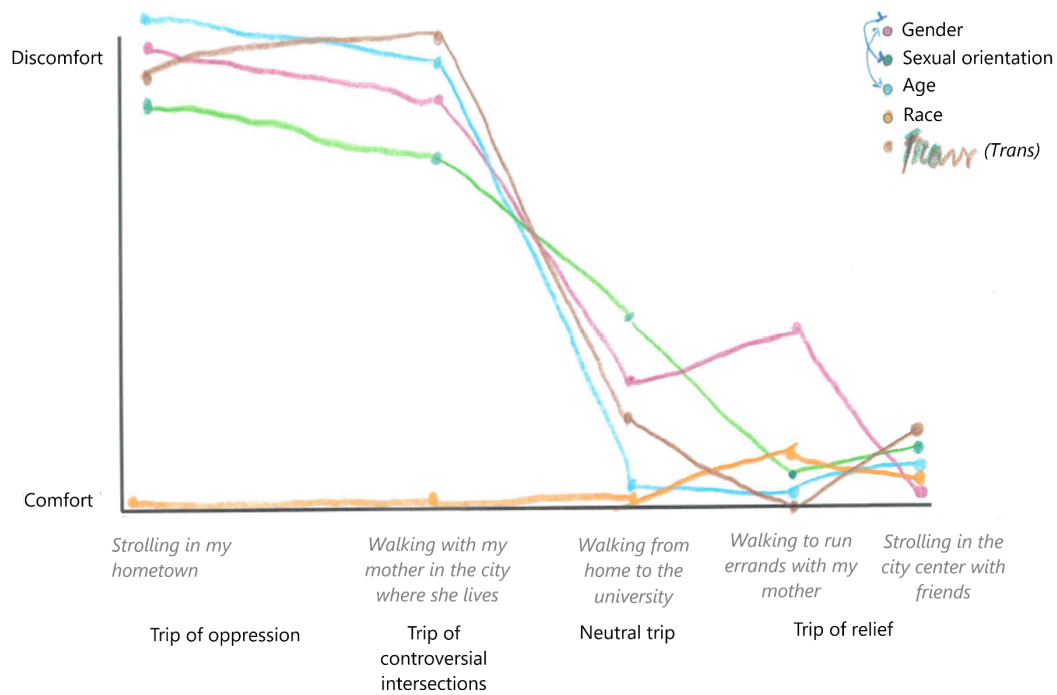


Figure 4. Olivia's relief map, a white bisexual transgender woman in her twenties.

Discussing cycling experiences among Women of Colour, Pedroso and Aldred (2023) suggest that representations of joy can challenge the norm and act as a counter-discourse to narratives of erasure, victimisation, and anger. Similarly, framing queer joy as part of the queer trip could help nuance mainstream narratives of queer fear. Queer visibility en route, in this case, accompanied by self-care -or trans care (Malatino 2020)- strategies is also framed as a form of everyday resistance to heteronormative power (Isoke 2014) that paves lines of queer desire.

While some participants resist in-situ norms, others such as Queralt seek relief through relocating their journeys of queer visibility:

If I leave my house in drag and walk down the street, I don't feel comfortable at all. But if I was in the city centre, I would feel comfortable. There, I like crossing paths [with other women], there can be an exchange of glances. You don't have to pretend; you already are, you know? You're visible, you're noticeable. There's inclusion,

1 there's acceptance, you don't have to justify yourself, unlike in other areas. In that
2 moment you think, 'I'm having a good time.'

3 While Queralt conforms to the norm in her neighbourhood, on the city periphery,
4 she chooses to travel to a place where she feels at ease expressing her queerness and
5 where visibility is regarded as joyful. This testimony echoes the mental map of queer
6 women of where they feel comfortable holding hands while strolling, illustrating the
7 intermittence of queer belonging in the city (Giesecking 2020). This exemplifies how not
8 only emotions are tied to geographies, further illustrated by the Relief Maps, but also
9 willingness to conform or challenge normativity.

10 Downtown (labelled as 'Ciutat Vella' in Figure 1), where Queralt and many
11 participants locate trips related to entertainment or meeting queer friends, does not
12 overlap with the gaybourhood known as Gaixample. Gaixample was mentioned only by
13 one participant, as being located on her way to an LGBTQIA+ association. Downtown,
14 on the other hand, has historically been oriented towards queer women's organisations
15 and nightlife (Albarracín Soto 2008; Donovan 2016). Nonetheless, some participants
16 express discomfort walking through it due to the presence of tourists, who are perceived
17 as the normative others (see the left trip in Figure 2 and Rushbrook (2002)), and the
18 recipient of existing amenities. This seems to point to the diverse relations that members
19 of the LGBTQIA+ community have with different spaces and temporalities.

20 Although in the past subsection we discussed how some interviewees cautioned
21 that couple display increases visibility and attracted the attention of passersby, some
22 participants opt to show affection during their trips as they perceive it as a political
23 statement to map out queer visibility. For example, Irene uses couple display to deviate
24 from heteronormative assumptions about her and her girlfriend:

1 We went for a walk at the fair, and some guys who were staring at me, like [they
2 were saying] ‘that woman looks very beautiful,’ or comments like that. Obviously,
3 they didn’t know I was with my girlfriend. When she [my girlfriend] got closer, she
4 told me, ‘Kiss me so they can see we are a couple’.

5 Performing queer sexualities when travelling, although drawing unsolicited
6 attention as it disorients heteronormativity, can be, in some cases and geographies,
7 regarded as a simultaneously joyful and political experience. This tension between feeling
8 calm and defying normativity is expressed by Berta:

9 In the centre of Barcelona, I feel very relaxed about being a lesbian and publicly
10 expressing it. It’s true that I’m white and have certain privileges, such as a stable
11 job. But the fact of being a lesbian, and how I experience it, is like a political stance;
12 you’re challenging the patriarchal system itself.

13 Similar to the experience of other queer women, for Berta, displaying love in the
14 streets is perceived to constitute a political claim (Stasińska 2022). Unlike in Stasińska
15 (2022), showing affection in Barcelona is not intrinsically tied to feelings of fear. This
16 may be linked to LGBT-affirmative legislation passed over the last decade (Browne and
17 Nash 2023), which is perceived to provide comfort to queer people using public spaces
18 (Stella, Flynn, and Gawlewicz 2018). These laws enhanced legal protections against hate
19 crimes based on sexuality and gender identity, depathologised trans identities by
20 recognising self-determination as a fundamental right, banned conversion therapy, and
21 ensured equal parenthood rights for LGBTQIA+ couples. Berta’s quote also reminds to
22 the radical potentials of the lesbian flâneur as someone with her queer sexuality in control,
23 which constitutes a menace to heteropatriarchal spatial hegemony (Munt 1995).

1 ***‘Cycling is really safe because I go full speed’: Pedalling away from oppression***

2 Participants who talked about biking did not mention public space interactions in the same
3 way as for walking. Instead, biking-related narratives were more directed toward a
4 solitary and speedier experience, to some extent protective but also carrying its own
5 distinctive threats. Compared to walking, informants such as Elisabet describe the faster
6 pace of biking as helping them alleviate feelings of discomfort.

7 Cycling is really safe because I go full speed on my bike, and people don’t have
8 much time to react and say, ‘Oh, a trans woman on a bike’.

9 Therefore, biking offers some sort of relief since it enables participants to escape
10 unwanted social interactions and cycle ‘straight’ to the point. This finding is shared by
11 women cyclists when negotiating street harassment (Sersli et al. 2022; Heim LaFrombois
12 2019). Thus, safe cycle lanes could be seen as a crucial part of queer infrastructure,
13 allowing access to the city while alleviating discomforts. However, cycling may also
14 make visible identities that lie outside white normativity (Pedroso and Aldred 2023).
15 Clara talks about her experience when cycling with her partner:

16 I’m aware that I’m very careful when biking. She [my white partner] dares to ring
17 the bell. It’s different how they give you permission or look at you favourably as you
18 pass by. Suddenly, it’s not as serious if I, being white, cross in front of a car. I have
19 a couple of friends who told me, “the police has never stopped me, I would run red
20 lights and they are like ‘be careful’”. I’ve already been ticketed, lectured, and it’s
21 like they enjoy asking me for my documents.

22 Her words resonate with black and brown cyclists’ experiences of harassment
23 from police and disproportionate ticketing (Lubitow, Tompkins, and Feldman 2019; Osei
24 and Aldred 2023). Like Clara, some of those other study participants spoke of always
25 taking extreme care and ‘following’ the law, by comparison with their perception of

careless white cyclists. Sersli et al. (2022) frame safekeeping as rooted in gendered processes, and here they are interwoven with racialised processes.

Clara's unwillingness to assertively negotiate traffic may go hand in hand with an unwillingness to tolerate racial and sexual harassment (Graystone, Mitra, and Hess 2022). Hence, some women cyclists might feel discouraged from taking the lane (i.e. cycling away from the gutter, which may be safer but also open them up to harassment from motorists) in contexts with strong norms of male and white appropriation of public space (Sersli et al. 2022; Lubitow, Tompkins, and Feldman 2019). Clara's behaviour contrasts with her girlfriend's, who is able to reclaim space partly through performing whiteness. Indeed, many (white) participants expressed how the still car-dominated streets of Barcelona necessitated an assertive or even aggressive cycling style. As such, participants opt to perform normative masculinities as a form of self-caring by being spatially and bodily assertive. This is described by Adela speaking of her experience on her way to the gym (Figure 2) and Uxue, on their way to work:

Sometimes when I cycle, I am more like, yeah, defiant. Somehow, I perform a more masculine role when I bike. (Adela)

I have a privilege because of my physical appearance. I mean, people take me seriously when they see me on a bike because I have a lot of muscles, in other words, I go quite fast. If I had a different appearance, they wouldn't take me as seriously. (Uxue)

Similarly, other authors have found that cyclists who do not identify as men may feel nudged to follow normative masculinities by asserting space or pedalling fast in order to make themselves visible and respected (Heim LaFrombois 2019; Cubells, Miralles-Guasch, and Marquet 2023; Sersli et al. 2022; Ravensbergen 2022), drawing on and helping to reproduce stereotypical orientations of cycling as a hyper-masculine practice (Soliz 2022; Balkmar 2018). Somehow, this intertwines with the lesbian flâneur

1 experience, in which the invisibility that emanates from taking the path of masculinity
2 allows to navigate the city freely (Munt 1995).

3 However, some interviewees seek to disorient that rhetoric by mocking or
4 provoking the performative masculinity still dominant in Barcelona's cycling cultures.
5 This is the case of Berta on her way to therapy or Dani, responding to the last statement
6 of their partner Uxue:

7 I overtake guys cycling just to annoy them. They get competitive, make passes that
8 put you at risk, invading the opposite lane... unfortunately, cycling is a display of
9 masculinity that really annoys me. (Berta)

10 I know that femininity in bike spaces is always associated with not having a clue and
11 being a joke. And I believe I play with it by wearing pink, for example. I want people
12 to tell me nonsense because it annoys me that there's only respect for masculinity.
13 (Dani)

14 Both strategies of parodying or re-signifying gender norms can be considered as political
15 in nature as they destabilise binary categories of gender (Butler 2004). If we understand
16 paths and gender as a 'stylized repetition of acts' (Butler 2006), participants' actions
17 subvert normative practices through the same process of repetition by creating gender
18 alternatives and paving networks for queer mobilities. However, while cycling allows
19 participants to quickly move away from unwanted social interactions, the limited space
20 in bike lanes forces cyclists closer together, making them feel that asserting their presence
21 puts their body at risk. This aligns with the idea that cycling is an experience of "intense
22 embodiment," as it heightens awareness of their physical existence (Ravensbergen 2022).

23 ***'As if nothing can happen to me': Queering cities through mobilities***

24 As Ahmed (2006) notices, orientations 'point us toward the future'. Further, queerness is
25 often regarded to inherently contains utopian possibilities, a sense of hope for a different

1 future (Muñoz 2009). Hence, in this section, we are interested in whether interviewees
2 ‘have a direction’ of what the future of queer mobilities should be. We explore these
3 reorientations by asking participants to map out what should change for them to feel
4 better. Interviewees imagined scenarios with unconfined mobility, where they do not have
5 to detour performing other genders and sexualities, and thus they do not have to police
6 queerness. This is summarised by Francesca:

7 I would like to not have to check if someone is holding hands or not, I would like to
8 know that I can just do it. If I want to walk at night because I feel like strolling, I
9 need to be able to do it and not have to take the bike and go as fast as possible because
10 it’s past 11. And I would like that, if I want to listen to music, I can go out for a walk
11 and feel like... well, as if I were in my room, that nothing can happen to me.

12 She wishes to extrapolate how she feels in the intimacy of the private space to
13 public space. Since public space represents a reflection of normative sexualities (Butler
14 2009), the participant echoes the concept of ‘queer futurity’ by Muñoz's (2009) by
15 imagining a future beyond the limitations of heteronormativity in which she shows
16 affection in the streets, or walks at night feeling comfortable. This future may also claim
17 sidewalks and bike lanes as an essential part of the city’s queer infrastructure to ensure
18 queer people’s wellbeing (Campkin and Marshall 2018).

19 It is also worth mentioning that, in contrast to Rodó-de-Zárate (2015) findings,
20 our informants were able to imagine futures free from lesbophobia, transphobia,
21 misogyny or racism. This might be due to major legislative changes during the past
22 decade having imprinted on the ground of Barcelona alternative routes to inhabit the city
23 (Browne and Nash 2023). Yet, the right to feel comfort in the city, claimed by Rodó-De-
24 Zárate (2017) and present in Francesca’s quote, is still not guaranteed. Participants
25 imagine a public space that allows them visibly to deviate from the path of
26 cisheteronormativity. This is echoed by how Olivia imagines public space:

1 I would like to be in the street and that nobody turns around, to dress how I want and
2 to feel that nobody is staring at me.

3 Paradoxically, participants advocate for a future of LGBTQIA+ visibility in which
4 queerness is unnoticed in a positive way. This is in line with the experience of queer
5 migrants in Scotland, who find comfort in the fact that their sexuality is ‘mainstream’ in
6 the public sphere compared to their place of birth (Stella, Flynn, and Gawlewicz 2018).
7 Participants imagine a future of acceptance where citizens care for each other to nurture
8 feelings of belonging, as discussed by Adela:

9 I have a lot of colleagues who walk with fear, you know? It’s like... how do we stop
10 this from continuing to happen? So, I don’t know, I would like it to be a place where
11 people talk more... It’s such an anonymous space, which is sometimes okay, but
12 sometimes it’s completely dehumanized.

13 She proposes a network of allyship between neighbours as a lifeline from
14 violence. This testimony not only highlights how queer people resist, but reimagines time
15 and space to create new possibilities for existence and belonging, mirroring Keeling’s
16 (2019) exploration of queer times and Black futures. A direction towards this future goes
17 through queering mobilities, as expressed by Núria:

18 To me, queer mobilities have to do with transfeminism, with breaking ableism. I
19 believe that it’s how we share, how we move... it’s about the perspective: the way I
20 pedal, the rhythm, and that doesn’t mean that there should be only one [rhythm].
21 To me, all that is to be queer, right? To consider the diversity of people who are
22 going to use the space.

Participants saw ‘queering’ as questioning the norm through spatial practices of care to make their lives liveable, but also as a ‘mode of being in the world that is also inventing the world’ (Muñoz 2009, p.121).

Conclusions

This paper contributes to queer geography by examining the lived mobility experiences of 22 non-binary people and queer women navigating Barcelona on foot or by bike. Using a mixed-methods approach that incorporates Relief Maps, it offers insights into how intersecting power structures shape queer wayfinding and place-making. The results reveal the social and emotional strategies queer people employ to guarantee their access to and well-being in the city. While addressing the disorientation and discomfort often encountered in navigating normative spaces, the study also discusses how queer people follow lines of desire, reorienting themselves toward joy. These orientations challenge (moto)normativity and carve out paths of queer visibility and comfort.

Further research is required to better comprehend the complexity of such experiences for different settings and identities, also including how bicycles can be accessorised to politicise sexual and gender identities. While the current study analyses different urban landscapes, mapping the specific location of trips would deepen our understanding and cities, offer a nuanced perspective on spatial practices and social networks. With that, our findings gathering queer people’s orientations toward the future and their demands for cities to ensure their wellbeing highlight the importance of public authorities recognising their duty of care to residents from the LGBTQIA+ community (Matt C. Smith, Gilchrist, and Lim 2023). Central to this vision is the understanding of sidewalks and bike lanes as lifelines within the city’s queer infrastructure (Campkin and Marshall 2018).

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[anonymised]

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