**Preliminary Exam Statement**

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Introduction

The following statement is in preparation for the preliminary examination as part of the University of Washington’s Department of Geography doctoral program. The statement will outline my academic background, research interests, and a discussion of my exam areas with my initial reading lists. I hope this statement reflects my professional goals and direction for my degree and my understanding of geography.

*Background/Research possibilities*

From 2008-2012, I attended Lindenwood University where I pursued a Bachelor of Arts degree in history and secondary education. Gradually as I progressed through the program, I discovered while I still had a passion for education I wanted to go further by pursing a PhD. I dropped the secondary education component and in lieu of it wanted to have minors that reflected various academic interests. A social studies minor was chosen because I had already completed the requirements and reflected my attitude toward interdisciplinary studies. I also did a minor in sociology, which almost became a double major but then I discovered geography. The university had one geographer and no program so I created my own minor, which included courses on economic geography, historical geography, GIS, world regional geography, the geography of food and an independent study in cultural geography. During that independent study I discovered my interest of trying to understand LGBT neighborhoods and how my experiences as a gay man in St. Louis informed my understanding of LGBT space in the city. Additionally my senior thesis for history included original archival research using City of St. Louis court documents examining a local divorce from the mid 1800s and examining that specific divorce as it related to the national conversations of divorce going on in the United States at that time. While not very geographic it does reflect my interest in archival research and studying gender.

Eventually I decided that while I still appreciate history, geography can take me further and reflects my interests holistically better then history, as geography allows not only a modern examination of society but also an historical one. I pursued my MS in geography at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. My courses included the geography of food, spatial thinking and behavior, history and philosophy of geography, social justice and geography, and medical geography. In many ways I entered the program already prepared with my thesis topic so my courses some times informed my thesis, but I put an emphasis in course work that expanded my understanding of geography as a whole and covered my interests beyond my thesis.

For my thesis project, I continued my interest as an undergrad to examine LGBT neighborhoods. My thesis literature focused on the common characteristics that have been used to examine these neighborhoods. The characteristics included: a historical connection (Castells 1983; Chauncey 1994; Hindle 1994; Wright 1999; Kitchin 2002; Podmore 2006), a concentrated LGBT economy (Rushbrook 2002; Visser 2003; Bell and Binnie 2004; Binnie and Skeggs 2004; Collins 2004; Sibalis 2004; Hunt and Zacharias 2008; Ruting 2008), a residential concentration (Knopp 1990; Bouthillete 1997; Kane and Hayslett-McCall 2004; Brown and Knopp 2006), and a cultural landscape (Skeggs at al. 2006; Doderer 2011). In addition, I examined the roots of understanding these neighborhoods (Wirth 1928; Park at al. 1967; Castells 1976; Levine 1979; Castells 1983; Abrahamson 1996) and other studies that examined neighborhoods more holistically (Hindle 1994; Levay and Nonas 1995). Following these literatures, I felt that I never could find this consistent understanding of what makes an LGBT neighborhood. While every place is unique, I wanted to understand what common threads defined these neighborhoods and the literature provided those characteristics. I then decided to apply those to St. Louis and studied the entire city with a focus on the neighborhood that is commonly described as the Gayborhood of St. Louis. After interviewing business owners in that district, surveying the population, analyzing the landscape of the recognized LGBT district and understanding the LGBT history of the city; I showed that there was not an LGBT district in St. Louis as described in the literature, however historically there has been more defined LGBT space in St. Louis.

Currently, I still do not have a specific direction for my dissertation. During Professional Writing, however, I did begin the process of turning part of my thesis into something to be published. What became very clear to me was that the historical analysis piece was not only my personal favorite but was the most compelling and knowledge producing part of the thesis. As I reflect on my thesis research, it was also one of the most challenging parts of the research and the most enjoyable. That piece I believe reflects my direction in geography. I know I want a dissertation project that advances LGBTQ historical geography. There are so many stories to still be told from our past and these stories have a place. Regionally however I am still specific to North America but I am leaving myself open to what place I want to investigate. I do see potential in St. Louis, however I imagine there is also work that could be in the Pacific Northwest and possibly also Canada. I also feel that historical literature has a strong focus post World War II. However, I would argue there is more to be discovered before World War II that paints are complicated LGBTQ history that is much older then the gay liberation movement that occurs after the war.

Following this direction I have chosen three areas of interest that I believe speak to the work I would like to do and also my broader interests in geography. I have chosen cultural geography, queer-feminist geography, and qualitative methods in geography. These areas certainly over lap and I believe all have a historical component that should be acknowledged and help inform later historical geography research. My interests usually rest in queer-feminist thinking but with a focus on culture and society using qualitative methods to examine the phenomena being studied.

Cultural Geography

*Defining Place*

Tuan’s (1977) *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* has greatly influenced my thinking on how I define place. Following his work in *Topophilia* (1974), Tuan argues that the idea of place is more then just nature and the built environments but that place includes artifacts like your favorite armchair, music, and even other humans like family members. He argues that space is more abstract then place because once we have a space then we establish value to it, which then makes it a place. Place he says gives us security, while space is opened but also fearful, which he examined even further in the *Landscapes of Fear* (1979). His notions of space and place followed his arguments concerning topophilia where he argues that human’s reaction to the environment is more cultural then biological but at the same time he recognized that the response is different for everyone because of uniqueness. He saw the importance of individuality but also acknowledged that the dominant culture will still have an affect and to a certain point culture can cause perception to be totally distorted (Tuan 1974).

Knopp’s (2004) ontologies of place, placelessness, and movement with a focus on diffusion also speak to my understating of place within cultural geography. Place, Knopp (2004) argues, should be seen beyond just a material item that can have power but it can also be seen in a metaphysical sense along with a material presence. Meaning that place is flexible and can be reinvented. In relation to queer theory we can see that “Queers are actively engaged in processes of personal reinvention that intrinsically entail examinations of ourselves and our surroundings. We are keenly aware of the hybrid nature of our existences, and of the highly contingent nature of both our power and the constraints on it” (Knopp 2004, 129). However in understanding place we also need to understand placelessness and movement. Placelessness, which is argued, as a practice that represents the lack of place in the identity experience, is the opposite of place and experience that is just as important to the human experience (Knopp 2004). Movement, specifically diffusion, can be described as people leaving legacies and absorbing others (Knopp 2004). These three concepts along with the work of Tuan have defined my concept of place and how I apply it to people and culture.

*Landscapes as Text*

The basis for my understanding of cultural landscape methodology is in Lewis’ (1979), “Axioms for Reading the Landscape.” Lewis’ first axiom states that the landscape in one part of a city can be different from the rest (1979). Part of my thesis research was discovering what made spaces different in comparison to the city as a whole to determine if a cultural landscape existed which included factors such as decorations on buildings and “tastes” of the culture (Lewis 1979, 178). Lewis’s second axiom describes that all the markers of culture are of equal importance and show unity (1979). Lewis in this third axiom made the point of including common items (e.g. street lights, hydrants) and their importance to a landscape (1979). Common items change within a space, which is important to consider in this study. This axiom then considers how the manipulation of common elements such as fire hydrants on a street represents culture in a particular space. The rest all continue this theme what understanding the small and varied details of the landscape as a text. For example his seventh axiom discusses the obscurity and the deeper meanings of the landscape (Lewis 1979). I have used his method in my work, however I do see a need to expand my reading of landscape as a text.

*Media Representation*

One specific area of cultural geography I have recently been exposed to is the geography of media specifically film. However, I actually draw on Tuan once again as inspiration for my interests. Tuan (1990) argued that fantasy sometimes can go along with realism in geography to better understand our lived realities and a good example is art created by humans, which can be considered fantasy but what does that tell you about a person’s perception, speaks to the real world. Later under qualitative geography I further examine the methods used in examining media. However, I would argue that work in queer theory, feminist theory and geography are the driving forces behind my analysis of media. This section still has a severe lack of literature but I hope more literature will be examined for the general exams and that will be reflected in my reading list for this section.

Queer-Feminist Geography

*Queer Geography*

Bell (1991) made the argument that geography while acknowledging the marginalized still had ignored gay men and lesbians. Work existed but that work he argued ignored most of the community and focused on gay white men, which ignored many others but also ignored the intersections of race, class, gender, etc. (Bell 1999). Queer theory from its inception has considered how sexuality and bodies have been missing in intellectual thought. Early theorists contested the ideas of identity, sexual categories, scholarship, politics and history while questioning who was not being studied like lesbians and other bodies (Turner 2000). Bell (1991) was beginning to make an argument for a queer geography that would go beyond just looking at wealthy gay white men while understanding how geography plays a role in queer lives. That is not to say that this understanding of queer geography has not been critiqued, work by Oswin (2006; 2008), Knopp and Brown (2003), Puar (2002) and Browne (2006) have all questioned what queer means within the context of geography.

In terms of space we see queer theory more heavily go toward the urban (Lauria and Knopp 1985; Knopp 1990; Bouthillete 1997; Knopp 1998; Rushbrook 2002; Visser 2003; Bell and Binnie 2004; Binnie and Skeggs 2004; Collins 2004; Kane and Hayslett-McCall 2004; Sibalis 2004; Brown and Knopp 2006; Skeggs at al. 2006; Hunt and Zacharias 2008; Ruting 2008; Doderer 2011). However I would argue that the rural space is still under studied within queer geography (Bell 2000; Rowanchild 2000). Additionally, following Bell’s argument we should also consider the identities queer geography is examining and still I would argue we see a focus on gay men. In the queer urban history section that follows, this issue is also very much true however a few examples break this mold (Valentine 1993; Rowanchild 2000; Podmore 2006; Muller 2007). However an even greater exclusion would be trans identifying people (Doan 2010; Hines 2010; Nash 2010). Specifically for both of these exclusions I hope future research will add to both trans and lesbian literature within queer geography. However we also need to take into account other intersections of identity especially race (Arondekar 2006; Olund 2009) and take on full intersectionality approaches that include sexuality, gender, race but also ability, age, class, religion etc. (Brown 2012).

Beyond who/what is included and excluded we also have to consider how queer geography affects our methodology. It has been argued that even positivist methodology can be used in queer geography, so we consider all methods to examine queer identities (Binnie 1997). In particular we have to consider the importance of mapping, including GIS, which has taken gay urban space “out of the closet” (Brown and Knopp 2006; 2008). However we also have to consider issues of power and governmentality when considered how data such as the census is collected and categorized when used either in mapping to in any other statistical analysis (Brown and Knopp 2006; Brown 2007). Additionally we can question how queer theory has an affect of qualitative research. Bain and Nash (2006) show we have consider the body in our research. I would agree and I would take it beyond ethnography and apply the same logic to interviewing and any other method that requires human interaction.

*Urban Queer History*

As stated previously future research will focus on historical queer communities in primarily the global north and the following is the literature I would draw on for considerations both theoretically and methodologically. Chauncey (1994) examined the potential for creation of an organized gay community within the city of New York by examining the period between 1890 and the start of World War II, making it one of the first studies of its time to look further then Stonewall. His central argument was that a gay male presence existed in the United States before the liberation movements of the 1960s and 70s. Chauncey (2010) then continued his studies by publishing histories on Harlem and Greenwich Village and considered how those urban spaces historically became areas for gays and lesbians confirming his earlier findings. Various other pieces of literature exist examining queer urban history. Wright (1999) focused on San Francisco and concluded that it began as an international port gathering a diverse mix of people, including gay men, which led to the development of gay and lesbian spaces. The Castro was argued as the central LGBT district but Wright (1999) was making a further point that San Francisco, as a whole, was welcoming to the LGBTQ community. However, geographically we have to understand the diversity of queer urban space development. For example Kitchin (2002) showed how San Francisco, Manchester, and Belfast, Ireland comparatively present three different factors typically contributing to gay urban development. Agency and political movement initiated the creation of a gay district in San Francisco, legislative and economic action drove developments in Manchester and religion-inspired homophobia, common among Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, created Belfast’s gay rights organizations to organize for equality; this led to development of an LGBT district in Belfast (Kitchin 2002).

Research exclusively examining lesbian spaces is not as prevalent in the literature. Podmore (2006) would be one example of lesbian focused work when examined Montreal historically, discovering that the creation of gay male districts undermined the creation of lesbian neighborhoods. She also argued that laws specifically against women would also affect the lack of lesbian neighborhood creation. Taking a broader view beyond just single city case studies, Myslick (1994) examined whether urban spaces have been places of safety or resistance. Safety and resistance are examined through the enforcement of heterosexism, prevalence of violence against gay men, fear of crime, gay men’s perceptions of safety, and power and politics of the landscape (Myslick 1994). Currently, in *Queer Geography* the course focuses on queer urban history, which is expanding my literature. These additional (Lapovsky and Davis 1993; Atkins 2003; Boyd 2003; Stein 2004; Houlbrook 2005; Faderman and Timmons 2006; Enke 2007; Murphy et al. 2010; Beachy 2014) pieces of literature will be included in the current bibliography and will be read by the oral defense of the preliminary exam.

*Feminist Geography*

While I separate queer and feminist geography I also see them largely intertwined, as both argue for intersectionality, however the key difference can be what identity is foregrounded. However both come from a commitment toward social justice and breaking down power structures that push a patriarchy and heteronormative control (Knopp 2007). Feminist theory specifically has impact on my methodology and epistemology*.* Haraway’s (1988) work on situated knowledge is seminal to my understanding of objectivity in the social sciences. Haraway speaks to feminism as a science and how we define ourselves within science. She argues that knowledge under positive approaches was being dictated through a particular lens that demanded generalizability but this was destructive to certain bodies being represented in research, something I believe counterintuitive when researching gender and sexuality. As Haraway (1988) understands it, situated knowledge makes us answerable for our perspective, which is a key difference in the objectivity. We locate our knowledge by making our knowledge claims accountable.

We see Haraway’s same line of thinking in Mattingly and Falconer-Al-Hindi (1995), who tried to understand the history of this new way of looking at objectivity. They see feminist geography has attempting to do two things: 1) the inclusion of gender in geographical work for a better understanding of human geography and 2) to produce knowledge that attempts to understand the struggle of gender. Additionally they understand that feminism has attempted to go against objectivity by understanding the researchers role and avoiding making generalizable claims (Mattingly and Falconer-Al-Hindi 1995). However Mattingly and Falconer-Al-Hindi (1995) also discuss other issues that have emerged within feminist thinking in particular the use of total categories in the description of gender. Another example of this feminist epistemology in practice is Lawson (2007) in her AAG presidential address on feminist care ethics. In her conversation about care as an emotion within science she speaks to this epistemology really well. She argues that as researchers we need to understand our relationship to the research. Additionally geographers have been challenged within feminist geography to consider sexuality in work and include sexuality, race, class etc. (Valentine 2008).

For my understanding of feminist geography in general and a greater understanding of the epistemologyI look at England (2014) who defines feminist geography by saying, “feminist geographies are analyses of the complexities of power, privilege, oppression and representation, with gender foregrounded as the primary social relation” (1). This is also my fundamental understanding of feminist geography and this definition gives me clarity on defining myself. She also argues that instead of seeing ourselves as experts, under feminism we see the researched as the experts. Additionally, England (2014) puts situated knowledge in feminism into practice with a conversation of reflexivity. If the goal of situated knowledge is to understand our own position then the practice of that is to be reflexive. To be reflexive is to scrutinize oneself during the research process and it extends to an understanding of power and what that power means for the research relationship.

Qualitative Geography

*Defining Qualitative Research*

In defining qualitative research I use Cope (2010) who described qualitative research by emphasizing the triangulation of data, production of knowledge while engaging the other, the integration of context and causality, and the focus on power relations. The triangulation of data strengthens the research but also the data then support each other, which has a long tradition in geography (Cope 2010). The social production of knowledge while encountering the other is essential for my research. My research always has focused on minorities and the marginalized and it will continue to do so. Qualitative research has a long history of engaging the other but currently we are gaining a better understanding on how to be reflexive when we do encounter the other (Cope 2010). Related is Cope’s (2010) 4th characteristic concerning that qualitative method should focus on power relations. Again my research has always focused on issues of sexuality and gender, which are both fields where we have to understand power relations in order to understand the issues that are present. Additionally, in relation to the power characteristic, coming from a feminist perspective also leads me to use more qualitative methods as well. England (2014) argues that for much of the history of feminist geography there has been a preference toward qualitative methods however it is still important to acknowledge the role quantitative methods can play in feminist geography.

Lastly, I also have to acknowledge that this idea of socially situated research in qualitative methods. To be socially situated has been described as to “reflect upon and analyze how one’s position in relation to the processes, people, and phenomena we are researching actually reflects both those phenomena and our understanding of them” (Jensen and Glasmeier 2010, 83). While not exclusive to qualitative research, it does seem to be an important feature of modern research. Qualitative research typically requires our interaction with other humans and our methods are meant to help us understand human behavior or human situations in a complex and deeper level. This means that we have to understand our position. Whether that position is as an insider or especially if you are an outsider, as researchers we are affected by our own presence and ideas.

*Relationship between Qualitative and Quantitative*

In order to understand the relation between qualitative and quantitative we have to understand the history of geography. These methods had moments in which popularity was a response to issues within the field of geography. Early in American geography especially before World War II, regional geography dominated the discipline (Martin 2005). The regional tradition focused on understanding regions as a whole and would require a variety of methods to understand both the physical and human geography of a region. However, as the regional tradition went away American geography had a crisis as its importance became questioned. The solution was the quantitative revolution that drove geography to become a science (Martin 2005). Following the revolution of the 50s and 60s emerges social movements that enter into academia as radical and critical theory such as feminism. That is not say that feminist and Marxist geography could not be done using quantitative methods but geographers do emerge questioning not only theory but also methods (Cope 2010).

I emerged from my MS perceiving that the discipline was struggling with an unhealthy quantitative/qualitative divide, because my experience in the geography department at SIUE presented me with a divide. There was a division in experiences where quantitative was pushed as more beneficial. However, I feel my new experiences here at UW have changed my perspective that there can be more of a balance between the two methods, but my preference and strength still remains in qualitative research. Research from Delyser and Sui (2013) and Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009) both have discussed the qualitative/quantitative division in good detail. Delyser and Sui (2013) wanted to go beyond the divide and advocated using both in a hybrid/mixed method approach. Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009) in discussing indigenous methodologies show that there are differences between quantitative and qualitative that should be understood. However, I would argue that we need to see the division as not a binary but rather as a spectrum. This is largely in response to work by England (2014) who describes the division more as a continuum where researchers fall somewhere. I argue that while I have the skills and mind set for qualitative I see myself in a spectrum where quantitative methods can strengthen my argument and reach a bigger audience.

*Method Focus*

**Interviewing**. As a methodological focus interviewing has always been key to my research and I see it as important going forward. Interviewing allows for a conversation between researcher and respondent to gain a deeper understanding of the respondents situation and perspective. Under interviewing I would also include life history, which I see as more directed interviewing with a focus on gaining a personal complete life history.

When considering methodology, interviewing is rather complicated and requires understanding to effectively do. From the place of the interview (Elwood and Martin 2000) to the interview structure (McDowell 2010), the method requires planning and thought to execute successfully. Place, especially as geographers should be taken into account. Place can effect the relationship between the researcher-researched. Interview structure is also an essential part of interviewing and I have had considerable experience with semi-structured interviews however I also acknowledge the benefits and weaknesses of structured and unstructured interviewing.

Work by Jackson and Russell (2010), have informed my understanding of life history. With my background in history I have had previous experience with life history. I understand life histories as being produced not just for research but also for archives and its aim is very specific in gaining a complete life picture with a focus on a larger aspect of life (Jackson and Russell 2010). It has its purpose and I see applications in geography because historically people’s lives change not just due to time but also space.

**Unobtrusive Methods.** Visual and discourse analysis are not new to me but I have had limited but exciting experience with it. I am more broadly interested in content analysis with a focus on TV and film as social texts. Dittmer (2010a) has discussed textual analysis and discourse analysis. However, Dittmer (2010b) has also used visual analysis so I would argue that way he interprets the use of text can be applied to visual analysis as well. Discourse analysis is described as looking for discourse, meaning looking at the text itself, and looking for Discourse, meaning how the content or text is situated in a social setting (Dittmer 2010). Gillian Rose (2005) also offers a detailed approach to analysis of visual methodologies. Her focus is photography, which is easily applicable to film as moving imagery - the same methods can be appropriately applied. Rose (2005) describes method as requiring the “reading” of the imagery several times and then focus on the theme of discourse throughout the images. Works by Bell (2003) and Farrimond (2010) are examples of how I approach the method and would use these methods to analyze stories presented in various ways that explore issues of gender, race and sexuality.

Archival analysis is also an essential unobtrusive method in my research. I have background and strong interest in historical geography, so archives are very important to me. They are analyzed for content, which is examined through some discourse. However, archives ultimately are a collection of human artifacts that speak to situations and attitudes of the time. There are limitations, because we do not know what we don't have, but archives are useful when incorporated with life history and other methods.

Graduate Coursework

*Relevant Graduate Courses Taken*

**Southern Illinois University Edwardsville**

GEOG 521- Contemporary Philosophy and Explanation in Geography

GEOG 451- Topics in Human Geography: Spatial Thinking and Behavior

GEOG 520- Research Methods in Geography

GEOG 500- Seminar in Cultural Geography: Social Justice and Geography

SPC 509- Special Topics: Qualitative Research

**University of Washington**

GEOG 525- Advanced Qualitative Method in Geography

GEOG 500- Geographic Thought

GEOG 572- Queer Geographies (Knopp)

GEOG 572- Queer Geographies (Brown)

GEOG 502- Professional Writing

GWSS 502- Cross Disciplinary Feminist Theory

CLIT 497- Special Topics in Cinema Studies (Queer Theory)

*Proposed Future Coursework*

GEOG 573- Urban Political Geography: Culture, Place and Politics

GEOG 541- Research Seminar in Feminist Geography

GEOG 542- Seminar: Social & Population Geography

GEOG 578- Theorizing Cities Seminar

GWSS 564- Queer Desires

Proposed Reading Lists[[1]](#footnote-1)

*Cultural Geography*

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*Queer-Feminist Geography*

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*Qualitative Geography*

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1. Several of these readings intersect in two or all three categories. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)