12 Queer Spatial Analysis

Amin Ghaziani

In 1990, Consumer Affairs reported that the US gay and lesbian population clustered in coastal cities. By 2014, unexpected new hubs had emerged in Salt Lake City, Louisville, Norfolk, Indianapolis, and other places in conservative states, while traditional strongholds like Los Angeles, Atlanta, New York City, Miami and Washington, DC, had fallen in the rankings of top residential locations.[1] As individuals make similar decisions about where to live (or where not to live), and as those patterns change over time, we redraw the cultural cartography of cities. Seattle provides a stark example. Between the 2000 and 2010 U.S. Census collections, the number of same-sex households increased in every single neighborhood—with one notable exception: the city's most visible gay district, Capitol Hill. There, the number of male and female same-sex households plummeted by 23 percent (Balk & Potts 2014). Zoom next onto the streets of San Francisco. A 2015 survey shows that 77 percent of people who have lived in the Castro for ten years or more self-identify as gay or lesbian. The percentage falls to 66 for those who have inhabited the area for five years or less, 61 percent for those who moved in during the previous two years, and 55 percent for those who arrived in the previous year (Staver 2015). Such migrations are inciting a "new turmoil" across the country, the *New*

Yorker notes, as more straights select gay neighborhoods as their home while queer people fan out to other parts of the city, the suburbs, and even into rural areas (Greenspan 2014).

What can we learn from gayborhoods? Rather than ask why they first formed or explain why they have been changing in recent years, as I have done elsewhere, in this chapter I use my experience with studying them as an opportunity to reflect on five methodological problems: (1) how to sample hidden populations; (2) how to interview in ways that capture the interactional tone of life on city streets; (3) how to position demographic statistics in a cultural context; (4) how to move beyond binary conceptions of urban spaces as gay or straight; and (5) how to identify indicators of sexual geographies. For me, these inquiries collectively capture the spirit of "queer methods" (Brim & Ghaziani 2016), and I use them to offer advice to future researchers: once you embrace fluidity, multiplicity, and silences, you will realize that the systematic and the chaotic are beautifully compatible in queer spatial analysis.

CENSUS CONVENTIONS

Gayborhoods are not tightly sealed districts; their boundaries are fuzzy. Existing studies in a number of disciplines have managed this problem by relying on census data to infer the size of the gay and lesbian population and to identify the density of same-sex households in specific geographic regions. One common strategy is to create an "index of dissimilarity." The statistic represents the proportion of minority group members (same-sex partner households, in this case) who would have to exchange places, usually census tracts, with majority group members (different-sex households) to achieve an even residential distribution: a neighborhood that replicates the sexual composition of the city overall. The index measures residential segregation and spatial isolation. Its values range from 0 to 100, where 0 represents total integration and 100 signifies conditions of extreme segregation. Research shows that male and female same-sex households became less segregated from all different-sex households between the 2000 and 2010 census counts.

Scholars also use census data to create a "gay index" that ranks regions based on their density of same-sex households. Developed by Gary Gates, the index is expressed as a ratio of the concentration of same-sex couples in a geographic area relative to the overall population. A value of 1.0 indicates that a same-sex couple is just as likely as a randomly selected household to live in the particular area. A value of 2.0 means that couples are twice as likely to locate in the area, while values less than 1.0 indicate that they are less likely to do so than a randomly selected household. Studies that use the gay index show that same-sex couples are much more likely to live in cities like San Francisco, Seattle, Austin, and Portland, along with smaller towns like Provincetown and Northampton, Massachusetts; Wilton Manors, Florida; and Palm Springs. City officials have taken a keen interest in this index because scholars who are visible beyond the academy, including Richard Florida, argue that it predicts economic competitiveness in a globalizing world.

The 2010 census was the first in which government officials allowed respondents to identify themselves as married to a person of the same sex (Massachusetts pioneered legal same-sex marriage in 2005). Studies that use data from that particular census still produce low estimates of the gay and lesbian population because the survey counts only *coupled* households. It excludes those who are not partnered (about a fourth of gay men and two-fifths of lesbians are in relationships at any given time). Those who do not live with their partner, those who are unwilling to self-identify as gay or lesbian, those who self-identify as bisexual, and those who self-identify as transgender also remain uncounted. These limitations raise questions: What does it mean that same-sex marriage makes some of us measurable while concealing others? If we know where same-sex couples live, does that tell us where *all* queer people live? That the census renders an incomplete portrait is not up for debate—the survey still doesn't ask about individual sexual orientation, sexual behavior, or sexual attraction, after all—yet it remains one of the few probability samples that we have about the gay and lesbian population.

Having considered two common techniques that scholars use to describe the gay and lesbian population and its geographic expressions, let's now think about possibilities for methodological innovation. The advice that follows is organized around a series of problems that I encountered as I was researching and writing my book *There Goes the Gayborhood?* (Ghaziani 2014b). I should note that these districts are generally white, male, and middle-class in composition. It goes without saying, therefore, that we can generate yet other principles based on the study of lesbian spaces and those crafted by people of color, ball and drag cultures, queer youth, and suburban and rural migrations. What I offer here is an incitement to further discourse for queer spatial analysis.

MISALIGNMENTS, MUTABILITY, DIVERSITY

Gays and lesbians are a hidden population, and thus they are impossible to randomly sample. You can address this problem in three ways. First, remember that sexual orientation is a composite concept; what you learn depends on what you ask. Your options include questions about attraction or arousal (the desire to have sex or be in a romantic relationship with one or both sexes); about behavior, acts, and contact (any mutual and voluntary activity that involves genital or bodily contact, even if an orgasm does not occur); or about identity (socially and historically meaningful labels that guide how we think about sexuality). Here's why measurement matters: if you define homosexuality by same-sex behavior, then you will omit gay virgins while including self-identified straight men who have sex with other men. If instead you define homosexuality by an identity label like *gay* or *lesbian,* you will exclude those people who experience same-sex arousal or behavior but do not identify as such. You'll also overlook those who identify as bisexual or queer, along with individuals who use language not tied to mainstream terms (e.g., "aggressive," "in the life," or "same-gender loving"). Did you know that in the biological and health sciences, a single instance of same-sex behavior automatically places an individual in the "homosexual" category regardless of the frequency of sex and whether the person enjoyed it (Savin-Williams 2006)? If we follow queer theoretic commitments to misalignments, the corresponding principle of queer methods is to be mindful of the components of sexual orientation—do not ignore, conflate, or reify them—and to draw conclusions based on the type of data you gather.

My second item of advice is to use sampling strategies that approximate probability theory. I adapted a technique, developed by Matthew Salganik and his colleagues, called respondent-driven sampling (RDS). This method of data collection uses a variation on chain referral, a snowball mechanism that is sensitive to community structure, geographic clusters, and social networks. Krista Gile, Lisa Johnston, and Salganik (2015) explain how it works:

> RDS data collection begins when researchers select, in an ad hoc manner, typically 5–10 members of the target population to serve as "seeds." Each seed is interviewed and provided a fixed number of coupons (usually three) that they use to recruit other members of the target population. These recruits are in turn provided with coupons that they use to recruit others. In this way, the sample can grow through many waves, resulting in recruitment trees. . . . The fact that the majority of participants are recruited by other respondents and not by researchers makes RDS a successful method of data collection. (242)

RDS is useful if your inferential objective is to understand how people who are connected assign meaning to their lives in specific spatial contexts, rather than to calculate central tendencies that you hope to generalize. The logic of this approach to data collection is to study networks within a population, each of which is heterogeneous in its contacts yet still geographically clustered. The chain of friends and acquaintances in each network should be large enough to generate ongoing recruitment efforts, even if some seeds prove fruitless for you as you seek additional referrals. Multiple waves provide access to parts of the network that you otherwise may have missed, and they avoid the small-world problem of short network distance between any two people.

I started with twenty seeds. This number is larger than what Gile, Johnston, and Salganik advise, but I wanted to cap the upper end of my sample to around one hundred people rather than the thousands common in big data studies. Four of the seeds did not produce additional waves of recruitment. The other sixteen snowballed into a total of 125 interviews with gay and straight residents and business owners of two neighborhoods in Chicago. I lived in the city for ten years before I did my fieldwork, yet I knew only one out of the twenty-five straight residents of Boystown; six out of the twenty-five lesbians and gay men in Boystown; two out of the twenty-five straights in Andersonville; and seven out of the twenty-five lesbians and gay men who lived in Andersonville. Thus, I encourage you not to get preoccupied with random sampling, since the procedure assumes that a given population is fixed and unchanging. Chain referral techniques are compatible with an understanding of queerness as mutable and group membership as fluctuating.

A third strategy is to maximize your efforts at representation by not relying exclusively on the census as your primary source of data. Andrew Whittemore and Michael Smart (2016) examined the street addresses of rental and for-sale properties advertised over twenty-six years in a weekly LGBTQ newspaper in Dallas. This type of data has its own limitations—"not all of this population can express their preferences in a capitalist land market," the authors acknowledge (2016: 193)—but it can track change over time, provide more precise data points than the decennial census, diversify your data beyond business listings, widen your analytic scope beyond traditional enclaves, and dismantle the tyranny of the couple that the census promotes. If you decide to use this method, keep in mind that property listings are skewed toward trendy and profitable areas, and these often attract heterosexuals. If you rely too heavily on advertisements as a proxy for queer people, you will underrepresent racial and ethnic minorities, women, people with lower levels of education, and economic variation. The more you can diversify your data and methods the better.

INTERVIEW LIKE AN ETHNOGRAPHER

Instead of conventional accounts that rely on demographic data and statistical techniques, I exploited the unique strengths of qualitative approaches, especially interviews, to explain why queer spaces are changing and to predict what will happen to them in the future. My decision was controversial. Some scholars argue that interviews capture ex post facto explanations for what people have already thought or done (Vaisey 2008). Others decry an attitudinal fallacy: what people say is a poor predictor of what they will do (Jerolmack & Khan 2014). Surveys can capture the prevalence of an attitude or a snap judgment—in, for example, a feelings thermometer about sexual integration—but these data exist at an individual level and are abstracted from lived experiences. When ethnographers encounter interview data like mine, they wonder about the situated nature of social life. What does it actually feel like to be a straight person living next door to a lesbian or gay man? Or to walk along rainbow-lined streets next to same-sex couples who are holding hands?

Interviews can capture interactional tones if we ask questions about specific groups of people and the situations in which they interact, even if we weren't around when the action occurred. For instance, I organized my conversations around a set of newspaper articles that presented scenarios in gayborhoods across the country. One story from the *San Francisco Chronicle* was entitled "SF's Castro District Faces An Identity Crisis: As Straights Move In, Some Fear Loss of the Area's Character" (February 25, 2007). The article includes a photograph of a woman, whom the reader assumes is straight, pushing a baby carriage on Castro Street with a rainbow flag visible behind her. Sitting next to my interviewee, I read aloud the following passage:

> To walk down San Francisco's Castro street—where men casually embrace on sidewalks in the shadow of an enormous rainbow flag—the neighborhood's status as a "gay Mecca" seems obvious. But up and down the enclave that has been a symbol of gay culture for more than three decades, heterosexuals are moving in. They have come to enjoy some of the same amenities that have attracted the neighborhood's many gay and lesbian residents: charming houses, convenient public transportation, safe streets and nice weather.

I then asked open-endedly, "What are your reactions to this headline, this photograph, or this story?" The question always generated a rich exchange.

I followed the same procedure with a second article. This one, published in the *New York Times,* was entitled "Turf: Edged Out by the Stroller Set" (May 27, 2004). The piece also included a photograph of a woman pushing a baby stroller, whom we again are to assume is straight, with two presumably gay men on either side of her who have been wedged apart by her stroller. I read this passage out loud:

> It was supposed to be a kind of homecoming. Last year, Chris Skroupa and John Wilson sold their apartment in Hudson Heights, in northern Manhattan, and moved to Chelsea, where, as a gay couple, they already spent most of their time socializing. But they soon discovered that the neighborhood was changing faster than they expected. Home prices were

> rising, and many of their friends were moving to Hell's Kitchen, a few blocks west of Times Square. In restaurants that used to be almost exclusively gay, they noticed an influx of straight customers, often with children in strollers. On a recent Saturday, Mr. Skroupa and Mr. Wilson went out for brunch and "literally less than one-third of the restaurant was gay," Mr. Skroupa said last week, pausing between bench presses at a New York Sports Club on Eighth Avenue.

The final story that I used to structure my interviews came from the *Huffington Post* and was entitled "Boystown Gay Bar Bans Bachelorette Parties" (2009):

> Bar owner Geno Zaharakis sat one busy evening at the window of his gay nightclub, watching as groups of straight women celebrating bachelorette parties made their way along a strip of bars in Chicago's gay-friendly "Boystown" neighborhood. That's when he made a decision now posted for all to see: "No Bachelorette Parties." Though the small sign has been there for years, it's suddenly making a big statement amid the national debate over gay marriage. While most gay bars continue to welcome the raucous brides to be, Zaharakis's bar Cocktail is fighting for what he sees as a fundamental right, and his patrons—along with some peeved bachelorettes—are taking notice. "I'm totally losing money because of it, but I don't want the money," Zaharakis said. "I would rather not have the money than host an event I didn't believe in." Gay bars are popular with bachelorettes, both for the over-the-top drag shows that some offer and for the ability to let loose in a place where women are unlikely to be groped or ogled.

I would encourage you, as a researcher, to harness the unique power of interviews. Unlike observations alone, interviews will allow you to learn about the subtleties of queerness in three ways: you can identify specific actors, situations, and symbols; you can ask respondents about their meaning; and you can focus your conversations on how symbols, in particular, structure the interactional tone of city life. Using media documents is an innovative approach in that it reduces the threat of social desirability bias. Respondents can offer comments about the characters in a story without implicating themselves personally. Be careful, though, about which vignettes you select. Although queerness can challenge reproductive logics, remember that many same-sex couples also have children. You need to acknowledge that symbols acquire significance in particular places and times and for certain groups of people. In the passages that I read aloud during my interviews, strollers and bachelorette parties were symbols that journalists regularly used as anathema to queer space. They were meaningful, richly resonant, and emic cultural codes that Chicagoans, gay and straight alike, shared in the 2010s.

STATISTICAL SILENCES, CULTURAL MEANINGS

Most research, as I mention earlier, uses census data to create an index of dissimilarity. As a qualitative researcher, I knew that statistical scores were silent about attitudes and motivation. What is behind the drop that demographers and geographers have documented in sexual segregation? A bird's-eye view of statistical desegregation is a fine place to start, but it will leave you with little more than a numerical description of a phenomenon that demands an explanation. If people believe something is real, then it is real in its consequences. As sociologists, we know this, and so perceptions about sexuality should matter in queer spatial analysis. In my book, I developed a qualitative counterpart to the dissimilarity index—a "dissimilarity meanings measure"—that I used to explain why lesbians, gay men, and even straight people choose to live in an area of the city widely recognized as a gayborhood. What a neighborhood means is more than the sum of the bodies that inhabit it or the central tendencies that describe it.

In addition to thinking about the cultural meanings of sexuality and space, rather than just the statistical distribution of same-sex households across census tracts, I would also encourage you to broaden your vision of the city beyond a binary conception of gay or straight spaces. Consider that gay neighborhoods formed in North America after World War II. Many gays and lesbians were discharged from the military at this time for their real or perceived homosexuality, and rather than return home disgraced, some remained behind in major port cities. These spatial clusters grew rapidly in the 1970s and 1980s. Gays and lesbians perceived their emerging concentrations as havens of tolerance that offered reprieve from heterosexual hostilities. Today, there is an emerging concensus among academics, journalists, and even residents that the significance of gayborhoods is changing. The wisdom connecting these observations that span several decades is as follows: gayborhoods are "a spatial response to a historically specific form of oppression" (Lauria & Knopp 1985: 152). When the nature of oppression changes, so too should the spatial response.

Making this move will permit you to unhinge sexuality from specific places, since gayborhoods, along with queer-friendly areas and queered straight districts, can exist anywhere in and even beyond the city. One surprising finding from my research is that cities with the highest percentage of same-sex couples who are raising children include Albuquerque, Salt Lake City, and Bismarck, North Dakota. This outcome should remind you of arguments from queer theory. Power operates through the imposition of binaries like gay or straight, male or female, and masculine or feminine. These binaries have always inadequately mapped onto people's lives. In early-twentieth-century New York, a man could have sex with another man without anyone questioning whether he was "normal." A world of "trade," "husbands," and "wolves" existed in a highly gender-segregated bachelor subculture alongside "fairies," "third-sexers," and "punks" (Chauncey 1994). The same thing is happening today with the rise of "dude sex" between straight-identified white men (Ward 2015) and "sexual fluidity" among women (Diamond 2008). When we apply this framework from sexuality studies to the city, we can see what I call "cultural archipelagos." Queer geographies have plural expressions.

INDICATORS OF QUEER SPACE

If the phrase "queer culture" denotes the ways of life of sexual minorities, and if those ways of life are merging with the mainstream as society embraces increasingly liberal attitudes toward homosexuality, then how can we detect distinct urban sexual cultures? The very idea of measuring queer cultures is thwarted in an era of acceptance, inclusion, and integration. What can indicate the presence of queer ways of life in a historical moment characterized by the dilution of cultural distinctions? What does queerness mean in a context of "cultural sameness" or being "post-gay," as I have called it elsewhere? How can we think about the gayborhood as an observable analytic unit in a time when same-sex households are dispersing across the city?

My final bit of advice is to be creative about the indicators that you use to identify queer spaces. Urban sexual cultures are observable, despite the integration of gayborhoods, through placeholders like anchor institutions and commemorations (Ghaziani 2014a). Anchors are organizations such as bookstores, bars, and community centers that have a special resonance among queer communities. They are the primary engines of community building since they locate the material culture of queer people in a symbolically charged place. One resident told me, "Businesses are an important part of anchoring the gay neighborhood and defining it in the same way that ethnic businesses would help define an ethnic neighborhood." Another added, "As long as those businesses are still here, that's a big thing that keeps the perception in people's head that Lakeview is still gay."

Commemorations are a second analytic device that researchers can use to identify queer spaces. These range from municipal markers like rainbow crosswalks to recurring ritual events such as gay pride parades and dyke marches. In a nationally unprecedented move, the city of Chicago in 1997 installed tax-funded rainbow pylons along North Halsted Street to celebrate the area's queer character. Bernard Cherksov, who was once the CEO of Equality Illinois, explained why this was a historic decision: "With these pylons we're saying, 'This is our community space.' People move in and out of this neighborhood for different reasons, but the community isn't moving. Boystown is still here." A professor at a local university agreed with this image of territoriality: "It is a political victory, an urban political victory to have any metropolitan or municipal authority allow you to fix identity to space. So many struggles are really about contestations of space. So, when you are allowed to plant your flag anywhere, I think it's a victory for lesbigay identity politics because it says we are here or we were here: this is an important dimension of the city."

Chicago is not alone in its efforts to install commemorative markers. In 1999, the Newcastle City Council became the first in the United Kingdom to announce that it wanted to actively build a gayborhood by designating a section as the "Pink Triangle." In April 2007, Philadelphia became the second American city to mark one of its neighborhoods as gay by renaming a portion of the Washington Square West district in Center City as "the Gayborhood." The city added thirty-six rainbow flags underneath street signs that bordered the area, which extends from 11th to Broad and from Pine to Locust streets. Finally, in 2013, Vancouver installed permanent rainbow-colored crosswalks in the Davie Village gayborhood. This was the first such permanent installation in Canada. Other North American cities that have installed rainbow crosswalks to mark and celebrate their local gayborhood include Austin; Key West, Florida; Long Beach, California; Northampton, Massachusetts; San Francisco; Sacramento; Seattle; Philadelphia; Toronto; Victoria, British Columbia; and West Hollywood.

Compared to racial and ethnic groups, queer communities lack a clear sense of ancestral linearity. The absence of awareness—who are my people?—induces collective amnesia about our lives. This is one of the most insidious forms of homophobia. During my third year of undergraduate study, I remember feeling astonished when I learned that the History Department was offering the course "Gay and Lesbian History." I had never imagined that such a class could exist. The narrowness of my worldview reflected the burden of queer communities in that historical moment. Anchors and commemorative devices protect against the temptation or coercion to forget. They, like other preservation strategies (renaming city streets to honor queer activists, for example, or building LGBTQ museums), fossilize the culture of a group in space and enable a sense of permanence amid the inevitable realities of migrations and urban change. That said, even those queer cultures that are based in a gayborhood involve more than a collection of organizations, businesses, and municipally sanctioned installations. Sexual ways of life also encompass the symbolic meanings associated with the closet; genres of television, music, and literature; ritual events like pride parades; the iconography of drag; camp; diverse family forms; and countless other measures that show unique subjectivities, aesthetics, and styles of socialization. None of this trivializes the analytic power that inheres in anchor institutions and commemorations. No single mechanism can explain the full range of variation in urban sexual cultures. What we need to do is to expand our methodological portfolio in ways that increase the degree of precision in our observations about sexuality and the city.

AN INTELLECTUAL MOVEMENT IS BORN

Queer studies is in the midst of a methodological renaissance. David Halperin's books *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (2002) and *How to Be Gay* (2014), along with the fall 2010 *Queer Methods and Methodologies* volume by Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash, indexed this shift toward methods by reframing the by-now-fatigued question "*What* is queer theory?" to the fresh inquiry "*How* is queer theory done?" The principles that I share in this chapter offer several insights about queer spatial analysis. First, we need to organize our skepticism as we respectfully question the concepts and categories of conventional social science. The dissimilarity index and the gay index are valuable but not without inferential limits. An effort to "queer" existing protocols requires us to embrace misalignments, mutability, diversity, interactions, and silences. Remember that sexual orientation is a composite concept; use chain-referral sampling techniques; access multiple data sources; and study sexual meanings alongside demographic statistics. Second, queer methods are powerful because they clarify the conditions that make life livable. In this regard, I offer innovative ways of interviewing that can capture the interactional tones of city life. Finally, queer methods create space for the coherent and the chaotic. Concepts like cultural archipelagos, anchors, and commemorations will enable you to conceptualize gayborhoods as analytically observable entities without naively denying the realities of residential and commercial change.

The volume in which this chapter appears births in the social sciences an intellectual movement that has been brewing in the humanities as well (Brim & Ghaziani 2016). A new generation of scholars like you is interested in identifying research protocols and practices that have been eclipsed by advances in queer theory. We are all concerned with how to link an account of a situation (what I would call a theory) with a set of guidelines on how to gather evidence about it (what I would call methods). The resulting notion of "queer methods" is paradoxical and provocative. While the queer ethic is deconstructive and anti-positivist, an emphasis on methods invokes a curious sense of order and patterns. The genius of this volume is in its demonstration of the many ways in which research methods, like sociological theory, can be freed from the shackles of a clean and tidy, either-or binary.

NOTE

1. The census first asked about same-sex households in 1990, offering hope for a revolution in how we study the gay and lesbian population. Unfortunately, the data suffered from validity problems because government officials recoded it. When a same-sex household identified as being married, the bureau changed the gender of the spouse to force it into the framework of a heterosexual married couple. Therefore, we need to be careful about how we interpret statistical data that uses the 1990 census. For more on changes between 1990 and 2014, see Allen 2016.

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