KENTUCKY QUASI-URBAN QUEER IDENTITY AND SPACES:
UNDERSTANDING THE QUEER IN-BETWEEN

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of Caudill College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
Morehead State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Kevin Blane Shields
April 5, 2017
Accepted by the faculty of the Caudill College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, Morehead State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree.

Verdie A. Craig, PhD,
Director of Thesis

Master’s Committee:

Verdie A. Craig, PhD

Ric Caric, PhD

Royal Berglee, PhD

Date
The following scholarship mends a number of extant divisions in social science and queer literatures. First, I consider “in-between” spaces, like Kentucky’s largest cities, as the sites of distinct queer identity construction. My approach extends and develops existing modes of studying queer identity through metronormative and anti-urbanist paradigms. Second, by relying on constructionist and feminist interpretations of biographical accounts, the work enhances the plural and alternative natures of queer identity narratives. Third, I employ quantitative analysis in my adaptation of the Modified Measure of Role Identity, exploring identity salience, conceptions of spatiality and identity distinction. I conclude that the importance of queer delineated space rests with its socializing opportunities, all of which further the chance for queer, quasi-urban men in Kentucky engaging with political and socio-cultural structures reflective of their shared sexual identity.
Accepted by: ___________________________, Chair

Dr. Verdie A. Craig, PhD

Dr. Ric Caric, PhD

Dr. Royal Berglee, PhD
DEDICATION -

Foremost, I dedicate this thesis and all the intellectual journeys leading toward it to Hazel K. Shields (1911-1994). Without your unconditional love, ability to inspire learning, and permission to think and believe freely, I’d have never had even the most basic abilities to reach these goals. You are a consistent source of reflection and encouragement to me. As your most independent-minded pupil, I still strive to reach the heights you saw in my capability. All good things flow from what you taught me.

This work is also dedicated to Melissa Darlene Richardson (1975-2011). In addition to being one of the most giving people I knew, you also never failed to cheer for my successes. Your friendship always made me trust in myself. We all miss you very much.

Additionally, this work is dedicated to my husband, R. Wayne Hogue, Jr. Thank you for sacrificing time and enduring my theoretical and methodological musings.

I would be remiss not to dedicate this work to Nelson D. Alexander, my friend of twenty years. You believed in me when I couldn’t even do that for myself; you pushed me at times so as to motivate me; and, supported me to move ahead with my choices. Your friendship has made such a difference in my life and choices.

Lastly, I owe this work to The Worthington. Its residents and staff opened my social life to the opportunities of intellectual dialogue and exploration that fed directly into this scholarship. Our era together is coalesced in this work, and my growth as a scholar.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend a sincere thanks to the thesis committee: Dr. Verdie Craig (Chair), Dr. Ric Caric, and Dr. Royal Berglee. A more complimentary and encouraging group of faculty could not have been assembled and have delivered better constructive feedback. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to your contributions toward my growth as a scholar. Each of you has an inspirational quality that students are lucky to experience.

In addition, a number of Morehead State University Sociology Department faculty members deserve mention for their efforts to improve and challenge my command of the discipline. They include Dr. Bernadette Barton, Dr. Suzanne Tallichet, Dr. Constance Hardesty, and Dr. Rebecca Katz. In your own unique ways, each contributed to my comfort level with sociological theory and research.

I also owe recognition to undergraduate faculty from Kentucky Wesleyan College. Dr. Leah Hoover, who served as my advisor, sounding board, and post-graduate career coach; I’m not certain I’d have been fortunate enough to put my feet in the right places without your input. Stephanie Curran never hesitated to supply recommendations, seek out life’s answers alongside me, or become a good friend. I can’t help but think that Ms. Curran serves as a guide for my center, always reminding me to be true to myself and never put aside my core essence.

In closing, Hazel K. Shields’s name belongs amongst these contributing educators. A grandmother, a best friend, my first teacher, and a model educator, she built the foundation upon which all my learning rests. She’d be proud of my choice to develop a thesis and likely to have helped me find ways to improve it. Her love of learning and teaching lives on in me.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction and Statement of the Problem ............... Pp. 2-8

Chapter 2: Literature and Theory ........................................... Pp. 9-24

Chapter 3: The Study ....................................................... Pp. 25-46

Chapter 4: Conclusions .............................................. Pp. 47-52

Appendices ......................................................... Pp. 53-54

References ................................................................. Pp. 55-60

Vita .............................................................. Pp. 61
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Historically, queer identities have been studied primarily within the urban environment. Whether through purely investigatory means, or by more representational attempts, the queer experience has arisen from discourses entrenched with associating queers and urbanity. Critical anti-urbanists aim to reverse or challenge such locational assumptions and draw attention to queer sites and social phenomena beyond the metropolis. This contribution addresses the divisions between queer urbanist and anti-urbanist approaches of study. What both sets of researchers have thus far neglected is the “in-between” of urbanized areas associated with rural states.

The division amongst scholars of sexual identity, touched upon in the introductory paragraph, allows for exploration of queer male populations and identities not firmly situated within geographic extremes. While increasing literature is produced on the queer male identity, it treats the rural and urban as the binary loci from which queer men ought to be studied and situated. In spite of an expansion of the queer narrative to include rurality, neither has the academic literature included much from intermediary sites (between urban and rural), nor have the expressed attitudes of scholars done much to encourage development of such research, characterizing any focus on non-rural queer identity as a form of “compulsory metropolitan migration” (Herring 2010:10). If sociology hopes to contribute to queer studies and sexuality, it must contend with some unfinished business: emphasizing the presence of queer identities and marking out the particulars of what that identity means to those who possess it, across disparate and untapped locales. This work means to answer the calls of both Green (2002) and Weston (1998) in its acute awareness of a spatialized and sexualized identity.
Intermediate locations, whether larger towns, small cities, or mid-size metropolises in states associated with rurality serve as specific and novel sites for studying queers. It stands to reason that such in-between locations house queer populations not sufficiently represented by either urban or anti-urban studies; there may also be queer men here who find such intermediate spaces, cultures, and societies more fitting for their unique preferences and needs. With few exceptions, the queer male narrative has been one constructed from the vantage point of the metropolises of New York and San Francisco. In recent years the academic literature has begun to include distinctively rural and Southern influences. Yet, neither can account for “sexual actors [who] cut across social cleavages, and we would be wrong to think that sexual orientation by itself defines the totality of institutionalized identities that one may occupy” (Green 2002:540). Furthermore, “to stay silent is never to ask about yourself, never to have an opportunity to share in learning about the history and culture of those like yourself” (Burns 2000:307-308). For some queer men, claiming their sexual identity encourages migration from where they grew up; for others, it represents disconnect between dual social identities. Either way, queer scholarship has yet to gain all it can from subjects without ample opportunity at expressing their identities and presenting the full range of meanings attached to them, especially related to research sites fermented in metronormative and anti-urbanist commitments.

For the sake of clarity, it is vital to distinguish between existing paradigms for studying queer populations. Foremost, the preference given to urban populations of queer-identified peoples is considered “metronormative.” A term coined by Judith Halberstam, “metronormative” has come to stand for the essentialism of urban spaces in the lives and livelihoods of queers. Johnson summarizes metronormativity best: “[O]f all the cultural truisms that lend some sense of coherence to queer life in the United States today, few are as widely
cherished as the belief that lesbians, gay men, and members of other sexual subcultures somehow belong in cities in way that they don’t belong in suburbs, small towns, or the rural recesses of the American hinterlands” (2007:5). Further still, the production of scholarship which accounts for urban queerness has done little to resist the common association of queers in cities. Whereas queer mythology consistently remembers the Stonewall Riots in New York, Compton’s Cafeteria Riots in San Francisco, and Cooper’s Donuts Riot in Los Angeles, it fails to account for similar and often times local occurrences of queer collectivity and resistance in less metropolitan locations. As a result, the privileging of urban space occurs at the sacrifice of all non-urban spaces in queer narrative construction. Metronormativity also favors the metropolis over other sites for the study and representation of queerness in social-sexual identity and cultural valuation. As a result, until quite recently, the only sources for exploring and extolling queer identity have come to us from a metronormative assumption. That is, to be queer implies urbanity and the normalization of large cities as the home to queer identity development.

Scholars like Weston (1998) and Herring (2010) challenge the metronormative paradigm with recognition of and departure from studying queer bodies along a hyper-urban axis. In part, Herring notes that “a habitus of metropolitan stylistics can be and has been manipulated, sidestepped, confounded, and superseded by queers resistant to normalizing lesbian and gay urbanities” (2010:21). This challenge to metronormative depictions calls itself queer “anti-urbanism,” finding “queer urbanity to be an incomplete, uneven project” (Herring 2010:29). Anti-urbanists’ focus rests with histories, sites, and narratives of queer identity brought from a richer diversity than the metropolis. This paradigm’s scholars resist efforts to overvalue urban sites, and attempt to construct the idea of rurality as one composed of arbitrary and capricious determinants; but more importantly, they attempt to dismantle the conflation of queerness with
urbanity. Unfortunately, while queer anti-urbanism challenges the urban assumptions of prior scholars on queer identity, it has concomitantly offered the dichotomous alternative site in rurality. This is not to necessarily suggest that anti-urbanism produces representations found solely in rural populations, but that its sometimes extreme dismissal of queer urbanity has occurred at a cost. Furthermore, the urban-rural divide within existing scholarship results in epistemological outcomes. In this sense, while the anti-urbanist paradigm espouses a more representational depiction and accounting of queer lives, it leaves outside its scope sites of potential inclusivity and greater holism.

In this thesis, I mend a number of extant divisions in social science and queer literatures. Foremost, I follow Green (2002 and 2007) and Seidman (1994) in distinguishing between queer theory and queer sociological objects; at once, I view social identity as both a dynamic social phenomenon, but also one capable of being studied and analyzed. Therefore, I rely on both classical and contemporary symbolic interactionist assumptions about social identity, while also paying tribute to the contributions of early queer scholars, who saw before them the opportunity to bring a sexual minority out of the shadows and initiate a process of intellectual discourse within the realm and context of socially contrived existences. While acknowledging queer theory's deconstructionist turn at viewing social subjects, I contrive that sociology has neither foundered itself on the utility of social identity categories, nor sufficiently explored the full range and implications of those stratifications. At the same time, queer theory can and should be employed as an analytical route of understanding and challenging power dynamics and stratification schemes themselves. In other words, not only do queer objects exist to be studied, but in turn, develop the queer narrative and historiography. In expanding this queer narrative and history, queer theory remains pragmatic for drawing out the instability of social
identification and effects of normalization. However, in no way should this brief theoretical description be understood as a reconciliation of symbolic interactionism and queer theory. Nor is it an unintelligible and misinformed effort to piecemeal these two analytical tools together for the sake of convenience. I embrace the differentiation in the subject matter, asserting that a queer social identity exists so long as such a category carries with it stratifying implications for that social group. This assumption also brings into question and relief the ways in which an existing queer narrative has spent its efforts normalizing particular and specific study sites, generalizing them as representative and exclusionary to all or most others. By taking up the matter of studying queer subjects along their own terms, and within the framework of their identity, I rely on the societal meanings of identity to posit distinctive experiences and dual identities. Implicit to such a project, I uncover the overarching assumptions and deficiencies left by other scholars, as well as the unspoken implications of prior research into queer lives, especially in relation to how those gaps have operated along hegemonic representations of the queer identity.

To best frame the research problem, I supply a personal anecdote as illustrative of our need to not only account for "in-between" queerness, but also analyze the social identity and markers afforded it. In June of 2014, two friends and I made a trip to Chicago. All three of us were reared in rural parts of the country, two native to Kentucky and one from West Virginia. However, all of us then lived in one of Kentucky’s major cities, and each had done so for greater than a decade. We each identified as middle-aged (between 35-50) gay men at the time. On our first evening in Chicago, we visited Boystown and stopped on the street to discuss our preference on the most inviting place to have a cocktail. While stalled, a small group of Chicagoan men passed nearby us, on their way to one of the city’s gay bars. In the very few seconds it took for
them to cross our path, and the even shorter time upon which they had to detect any socio-cultural difference, one of them sprang into song: “Sweet Home Alabama.” I recognized the reference to our “Southern” accents almost immediately. The only features which seemed to set us apart from them were our age and our accents: all three of us were professionals (an attorney, a faculty member, and a regional manager of rental properties), overtly middle-class by a variety of status markers, white, and wholly unaware of the significance of our accents. At first, it made little sense that a group of Chicagoan queers could in any way detect differences between our two small groups. Although the gentleman who serenaded us with his rendition of a Southern pride anthem got our origins all wrong, it was the basic association of us as “Southern,” and therefore distinct and separate, that stood out to me. Whether we had arrived in Chicago from the coal fields of Eastern Kentucky or a horse farm in the Bluegrass Region, or from the metropolises of the Commonwealth was of no difference. At once, classification of our separateness identifies the overvaluing of urban space when it comes to queer lives, but it also draws out a broader line of opinion concerning the way in which rurality is viewed from this dominant standpoint. It would seem that, if we take this young Chicagoan fan of classic rock at his song, all things rural present themselves homogenously to those within the metropolis. Symbols seen as broadly rural are considered equivalent to those particularly Southern, or even finitely Appalachian. Possessing identity and markers that establish a person or group as one of these things, for all intents and purposes, iterates all of them. And, while it may seem commonsensical to argue that an Appalachian identity makes one rural, it does not follow that being either of those things generates the equation this young man so quickly worked. More importantly and more vividly, whether we were from Alabama, Kentucky, or the Carolinas, we were viewed as rural. Our social identification with cities in our home state had nothing to do
with the way we were categorized on the continuum of rurality to urbanity. Our identities were entangled with rurality and conceptions thereof by an external categorization scheme. However, our internal perspective remained unaccounted for, irrelevant, and perhaps devalued. The same operative categorization of Kentucky as wholly rural was echoed by a high school friend many years prior. She struggled to accept that Kentucky’s cities had a thriving queer community, even though she had grown up in the region. I recall her saying “I’d have never expected Kentucky to have that many gays.” Our narratives and identities remain largely underrepresented. These insights demonstrate the need for scholars to make contributions to “in-between” areas and the queers who reside in and around them. Studying the construction of a social identity within intermediate-sized cities promises a superior understanding of intersectional negotiation—the conceptual meeting place of two or more social identities, if you will. We can think of this intersectional negotiation as a specific formulation of handling multiple social identities and ties, those specifically and precisely tied to being queer men from mid-size cities inside rural states. The literature has so far emphasized the importance of large metropolitan areas in the formation and collectivization of queer identities (Chauncey 1994), as well it has brought about a reactionary anti-urbanist depiction of a thriving rural queer identity and community (Howard 1999); finally, the critical anti-urbanists challenge metronormative assumptions and conclusions on the basis of their inherent value judgments (Herring 2010). Taken together, these efforts widen the research field, but perhaps also lose sight of the social identities contrived out of negotiation that is not clearly rural, but not wholly urban.

Overview

Three main variables emerge here: the degree to which queer men in Kentucky’s cities associate with their sexual identity, the level to which they perceive social differences in spatial
or cultural terms, and their expressed desire or need for specifically queer spaces in their lives. Using an adaptation of the Modified Measure of Role-Identity (Callero 1992; Reid, Epstein, and Benson 1994), a questionnaire was constructed to account for each variable. Survey respondents were recruited via social media, word-of-mouth, and researcher engagement with potential subjects. At the conclusion of the study, questionnaire data were analyzed for descriptive statistics, bivariate correlations, and ANOVA t-test. Those results may be found in Chapter 3, but indicate a particularly strong identification with sexual identity among respondents; results also reveal a strong desire for specifically queer space in respondents’ lives. However, those data cannot reveal details about the qualitative characteristics important to respondent perceptions of difference between themselves and queers from more urban or rural locations. For that, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven men. Interview contents reveal a distinct preference for available queer social networks and the space allotted to forging and experiencing a queer identity. While some frame this along terms of sexual openness, others reference a broader access to queer social opportunities and a distinct favor for Kentucky’s urban spaces.

Explorations of queer male identity in quasi-urban environments help challenge the false dichotomy between rural and urban accounts of queers. In this case, I find that along with a distinct, expressed interest in queer social structures and space, these men differentiate themselves from queers living in more urban and rural locations. For all of them, in some way, the relational opportunities of quasi-urban Kentucky space represent a special opportunity at fully living their lives in a socially unfettered, but tighter-knit environment.
CHAPTER 2: THEORY AND LITERATURE -

Theoretical Discussion and Foundations

*Social Embeddedness of Identity*

My foundation for this study employs symbolic interactionist views on the self and identity. Foremost, Blumer (1962) describes this approach as concerning “the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings” (352). Symbolic interactionism recognizes that socialization “is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another’s action” (Blumer 1962:352). Amongst those symbols and interpretations, social identity plays a significant role in the production, use, maintenance, and rearrangement of symbolic and interpretive cues. Symbolic interactionists recognize both the role and importance of social identity, but also consider it a fundamental source of social action. For his part, Goffman (1959) claimed that “the individual tends to employ substitutes—cues, tests, hints, expressive gestures, status symbols, etc.—as predictive devices” within social environments (365). Chief among these symbolic attributes, social identity includes both how a social actor aligns the self with the social world, and also how society aligns the individual within its frameworks (Goffman 2009; Becker 1963). Thus, I operate off the central assumption of individual and group forged social identities.

In brief, “if there is an epochal imperative for the late modern subject, it is to be found in the cultivation of a self—that is, an historical project” (Green 2007:42). In this spirit and to these ends, I identify a specific type of queer subject, within a precise point of time, and along finite geographic terms. I address movements of individuals and groups to and from locations
and hope to pinpoint the way in which this particular sexual minority develops and negotiates its social identity.

Social Embeddedness of Queerness

Sociology and queer studies both struggle to detangle themselves from queer theory, which in its contemporary forms attempts to deconstruct social identity categories that include queer, lamenting that recognition of such categories fails to consider the unstable nature of social identity, or reifies existing labels by placing emphasis upon their overall importance within the social milieu, perhaps both. In its effort to debunk and make the very nature of social identity "conceptually unintelligible," queer theory presses beyond the bounds where sociology and social sciences in general are working; queer theory unsettles too much to make it any further worthwhile when studying queer subjects (Green 2007:38). As a result, its intended disruptions have spilled onto the very subject matter from which it originated, nullifying the binds and commonalities which form the basis of queer studies and the sociology of sexuality. In all, queer theory has left us with less queer content and more in the way of subjectlessness and nonidentity. It would seem that a social-sexual identity that retains elements of its deviancy in mainstream would continue to bear both personal and social significance. The identity, itself, does not dissolve within the temporality of location, but may take up new properties. For these reasons, this study cannot be embedded within queer theoretical constructs that rely on deconstructionist methodologies.

In spite of changes to how mainstream society views and embraces same sex desire, it remains a stigmatized identity. On cultural, social, and political fronts, queer men face stigma directly tied to their social-sexual identity and practices (Preston and D’Augelli 2013; Adams 2010); therefore, undoing or decoupling from identity labels only masks and idealizes the current
state of socio-cultural and political action in the U. S. For example, Seidman, Pennington, and Sojka (2015) find that common use of postmodernist, queer theory radical subversion ideology encourages certain age groups to attempt a full rejection of sexual identities. Such social action speaks more to continued, widespread stigmatization of sexual minorities and the likelihood of internalized homophobia than it does to some liberationist ideal. Although inclined individuals cast aside the personal importance of alignment with a specific (or any) social-sexual minority, social categorization based on differences in desire and practice could effectively place the individual back into the sexual minority grouping. Rather conclusively, strains of queer theory which ignore sexual categorization and identification overlook the role socialization plays in binding individuals to specific social groups and assigning identity based upon sexuality. Given that sexual practice is social by nature, interactive and performative in execution, and socially regulated, it defies logic and lived reality for us to consider sexual identities either inapplicable or avoidable. For better or worse, society's reliance on sexual categorization seems cemented to sexual stratification, whereby the heterosexual identity is normalized and divergence from that identity remains stigmatized. Not only should the rejection of sexual labels be viewed with suspicion, but it should be seen as intellectual fallacy; for as long as sexual minorities reap a disempowered status, we shall continue to locate a reluctance of individuals to take up that particular identity. The work of equalizing or balancing sexual diversity beyond favoring heterosexuality cannot be accomplished by ignoring or negating labels and identities, but by challenging heterosexist norms, institutions, policies, practices, and ideologies. Pretending that de-labeling somehow does this work only prolongs and complicates the struggle for socio-cultural evolution; refuting the importance of sexual identity alienates individuals from committing to the lived conditions and experiences which help activate change, namely
oppression, misrepresentation, and stigmatization. All forms of sexuality which deviate from professed heterosexuality are queered. In other words, forms of sexual non-normative and sexual minority identity status (i.e., homosexuality, bisexuality, etc.) are treated as antinormative, or with a “capacity to undermine norms, challenge normativity, and interrupt the processes of normalization” (Wiegman and Wilson 2015:4). This process of viewing minority sexuality as deviating from the norm of heterosexuality begets the normalization of heterosexual identity practice. Hence, heteronormativity cannot be dismantled or questioned by declaration of a non-identity; it is only through the queering of sexuality and awareness of sexual diversity that heteronormativity may be efficiently challenged.

To embed identity in social stratification, consider the play identity status has upon the social ranking of a particular group. As Ridgeway sees it, “status beliefs fuel social perceptions of difference” (2014:4). This seems especially true when distinction marks a dominant group from a lower status one, in which case “status is based on the widely shared beliefs about the social categories or ‘types’ of people that are ranked by society as more esteemed and respected” (Ridgeway 2014:3). Being ubiquitous as well as a key determinant in stratifying processes, social status awarded to a particular group runs throughout the social identity attached to it. One cannot, per se, adopt the social identity of a queer man and simultaneously avoid the status to which queer males are assigned—at least, under normal social circumstances. This interrelationship between identity and status helps explain why social labels, categories, and alliances continue to hold purpose: society is organized around these principles. As such, it hopefully clarifies how nonsensical and inappropriate queer theory deconstructionist tendencies are to studying queer social identity’s relationship with spatial distinctions, not to mention the extent to which symbolic interactionist tenets, like status and identity, continue to offer us the
best choices for studying society’s constituents in their many forms. My work hereafter draws on efforts at “reconnecting sexual practice and identity to the patterned organization of the social world” (Green 2002:540).

Social Embeddedness of Rurality

Rural identity bears a long tradition of stereotype and stigmatization, both as expressed and experienced in its representations and in scholarly analysis (Otto 1986; Speer 1993; Wray 2006; Painter 2010). Rurality, therefore, exists within the stratification system based on status and enforcement of dominant power ideologies. To maintain the unit of analysis as identity subjects, the primary determination of rurality ought to arise from the “social construction of rural, in the sense of what people think is rural,” rather than arbitrary parameters and determinants more firmly circumscribed by empirical definitions (Pandey 2003:34). Bringing the focus to bear upon the recognition of and experiences of “difference” in subjects identifying as rural seems key to the theoretical, ideological, and methodological considerations at hand in this work. Following the train of internal consistency, and theoretical work which rejects deterministic impressions of defining rurality along clean lines, both rurality and urbanity shall be conceptualized as “hybrid spaces and fractured social terrain in a complex encounter with the questions of inequality, disciplinary powers and hegemonic struggles” (Pandey 2003:41). Contending with subjects who do not fit neatly into the frames of urban and rural portends awareness of the contextualized nature of identity. In contrast to men in Chicago, my friends and I must have seemed rural; in comparison to our neighbors, we are likely no more rural or urban than they; but in contrast to family members living in small towns, we three likely identify as more urban. Conceptualizing rurality and urbanity along a continuum, and with respect to contextual factors, helps to overturn the binarism already rife within the scholarship on queer
identities. Without distorting the subject too much, rurality is experienced in social interaction contexts. Therefore, rurality and identity take place in relationship to others and self-perception. In her assessment of film portrayals of Kentucky, Hardin identifies rurality and the “image of backwardness” as enduring depictions of the state (2000:19). Hardin’s claim suggests that both characterizations of Kentucky and its residents, and consumers of these images consider it a rural location. Furthermore, its association with Appalachia also implants the Commonwealth into a rural context and linkage (Cooper, Knotts, and Elders 2011). This follows prior analysis which found “Appalachian cities wholly invisible” within scholarly research (Satterwhite 1999). If both the academy and popular cultural depictions of Kentucky and Appalachia maintain linkages to rurality, then expecting the state to be seen otherwise defies the weight of evidence.

In addition to the general association of Kentucky with things rural, more empirical means of assessment yield similar outcomes. Data from the U. S. Department of Agriculture show that Kentucky contains a disproportionately high number of non-metropolitan counties (Rural Classifications Overview 2016). Although the population of its urban areas is 1.4 times that of those meeting rural classification, this sort of data leaves common understanding of Kentucky unaltered (U. S. Department of Agriculture State Fact Sheet 2016). Perry (1984) argues that urban and rural divisions are less about population density, and more about economic, service access, and experiential indicators. Since this research centers on social identity as an experiential indicator, I deploy both common perceptions of Kentucky and empirical data sources to validate claims of rurality and the in-between nature of its urban spaces as they relate to queer men.

*Lexington & Louisville, Kentucky: queer features.* Geographically situated amongst non-metropolitan counties of Kentucky, Louisville and Lexington are the largest metropolitan areas
in the Commonwealth. The Louisville Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) contains the city’s inner core and immediate surrounding counties in both Kentucky and Indiana, and holds a population estimate of 1,278,413 for 2015 (U.S. Census Bureau Metropolitan Statistical Areas n.d.). Lexington’s 2015 MSA includes 500,535 (U.S. Census Bureau Metropolitan Statistical Areas n.d.). In common with all MSAs, the U. S. Census Bureau considers each a city core with more than 50,000 people and nearby counties with a “high degree of social and economic integration with the urban core” (ibid). These two cities stand in comparison to Buffalo, New York’s population of just over 1.1 million, and Modesto, California’s 538,000 MSA figures for the same timeframe (ibid). However, the Buffalo MSA appears the subject of only a single queer-related study by Ruefli, Yu, and Barton (1992), and as a happenstance MSA included in the Walther and Poston’s (2004) work on homosexual relationship patterns. Both cities appear in Walther and Poston’s rehashed work on partnering patterns in the United States (Walther, Poston, and Gu 2011). The point here is twofold: small to moderately-sized cities are rarely the subject of queer inquiry; and, neither Modesto nor Buffalo are considered particularly urban or contrastingly rural. New York state and California do not maintain a close alliance with rurality, even though parts of New York fall within the broad categorization of Appalachia (Cooper, et. al. 2011; Appalachian Regional Commission 2009). Lexington and Louisville, however, remain tethered to the rurality associated with Kentucky. In effect, Lexington and Louisville reflect a queer identity of their own by acting as sites of non-normativity. Though comparable in population size to several other cities, their geographic inclusion within Kentucky efficaciously provides them the necessary rural background to seem at odds with common understandings of which sites comprise metropolitan sites.
Although Allen considers peri-urban space “a term qualifying areas with mixed rural and urban features,” such denotations may not fully represent the socio-cultural differences apparent in how Kentucky is viewed externally and by its residents (2003:136). Just as Myers (2010) troubles over the conceptual framework of urban place-making within Zanzibar’s West District as a peri-urban location with discrete social, political, geographic and historical features, also I prefer the term quasi-urban based on the following grounds: a.) the term is not associated with urban planning and ecology and, b.) quasi-urban is more firmly situated with “quite diverse social and physical characteristics” (Eyre 1979:97). Whereas “peri” refers to an object near or around another, “quasi” denotes similarity and conceptual over spatial closeness. As a result, Lexington and Louisville seem quasi-urban areas, ones sharing some traits with a metropolis, but lacking the key features which might classify them more neatly as urban space in the purest form.

Research Problem

Social identity of queer men from quasi-urban space may be partly attributed to the uncertainty of spatial categories. Regarding conceptual differences between rural and urban, Brown and Schafft proclaim “the boundary dividing the two categories is always somewhat arbitrary” (2011:7). This might help explain how and why queer identity scholars have favored more binary study sites: even when drawing lines at the extremes of the continuum (e.g., rural and/or urban), clear delineations make for theoretically objectionable categorization. Extending that to quasi-urban or quasi-rural areas perhaps generates too much indecisiveness and conceptual uncertainty for researchers. In fact, Brown and Schafft observe that their own students more readily concur on differentiating between extreme locations, “but give variable responses in categorizing the places in between” (2011:7). Thus, even within the anti-urbanist
paradigm of studying queer lives, the variability of distinguishing rurality from urbanity confounds inclusion of in-between sites and peoples. For queer men who stay or relocate to rural areas, the anti-urbanists have begun the process of extending literature to reflect these realities, but for those who never arrive in the large metropolis, much mystery surrounds negotiation of this unique queer identity. How do anonymity and familiarity interact to produce similarities and differences between queers in rural and urban areas?

Viewing the queer men of Lexington and Louisville, Kentucky, as well as this quasi-urban space as dually queer permits consideration for how identity operates across unclear boundaries, especially when such boundaries may not be very clear to those who express that set of social identities. Quasi-urban space, being neither precisely rural nor particularly urban in common understandings and definitions, establishes the conceptual uncertainty and relativity contained within spatial classification; similarly, queer identity acts as a non-normative status marker. Lexington and Louisville should be considered part of what Cartwright (2011) sees as the “anti-idyll,” yet also differentiated from the anti-urbanist tribe. Since the anti-idyll bespeaks “material histories and historical perceptions of rural life in the wake of massive rural-urban migration,” and because the anti-urbanists have yet to devote themselves to quasi-urban spaces out of fear of maintaining queer bounding within the metropolis, the very notion of an “in-between” space and identity becomes queered (Cartwright 2011:8). Furthermore, the quasi-urban queer reconfigures identity into spatial proximity and interpolation against the larger queer metronormative narrative. Yet, possessing elements of both rurality and urbanity in their shared identity must in some way confound, or at least complicate the acceptance of both metronormative and anti-urbanist representations. What specifically encourages the gravitation toward spaces neither urban nor especially rural? These answers may differ substantially from
the products of either metropolitan or rural queer identities. Schweighofer writes that "if different geographies of sexuality pose different sets of constraints on the individuals within them, it follows that the identities and communities produced cannot be read through the same rubric" (2016:240).

**State of the Literature**

Rubin (2002) cites three research efforts as some of the first to explore queer populations. These include Evelyn Hooker’s “The Homosexual Community,” published first in 1961, detailing the role Los Angeles gay bars played in socialization; Maurice Leznoff and William A. Westley’s “The Homosexual Community,” published first in 1956, covering observations about a large Canadian city’s queer male population; and, Nancy Achilles’ 1964 master’s thesis, “The Development of the Homosexual Bar as an Institution,” which focuses on the social institution of San Francisco gay bars at that time (Rubin 2002). Though perhaps considered too dated and theoretically irrelevant for contemporary discussions on queer identity, these works serve to uncover the metronormative slant in early queer identity literature, as well as the necessity of urban environments toward producing them. Such works challenged the dominant medical discourse on homosexuality, but also relied heavily on urban populations in order to present non-normative sexuality as a social phenomenon. These efforts paved the way for Humphreys’ (1970) later work, and eventually to those of Chauncey (1994), Kaiser (1997), Carter (2004), and Eisenbach (2006). Although Humphreys’ work may not aptly represent a metronormative account, these other scholars have produced meaningful works in terms of their reconfiguring and detailing queer historiography. In spite of that, they each overvalue the large metropolises’ place within queer history and culture. Chauncey, especially, represents quintessential metronormative conditioning. By placing pre-World War II New York as “prototypical” of the
“urban conditions and cultural changes that allowed a gay world to take shape,” he makes it the antecedent to formation of queer sub-culture (1994:28-29). No doubt, a fairly sufficient exploration of New York’s long, gay history may be necessary in order to take up similar projects elsewhere, or challenge its preemptive claim to sub-cultural dominance. Still, like other scholars of his ilk, Chauncey contends that queer sub-culture “was a distinctly urban phenomenon” (1994:131). Undoubtedly, these claims may expose a certain reality for urbanite queers at that time; they do little, however, to promote the pluralistic representations sought out by reactionary and critical anti-urbanists.

Unfortunately, Kaiser goes on to depict the catalyst of “urban freedom” as responsible for the spread of queer acceptance (1997:214). “The figurative gay metropolis is much larger: it encompasses every place on every continent where gay people have found the courage and the dignity to be free” (1997:xiv). Eisenbach follows Kaiser’s lead in establishing the metropole of New York as the center of gay power’s genesis (2006). However, what these scholars may not have noticed in their elevation of the New York metropolis to mythical heights, was what queer diaspora scholars Cindy Patton and Benigno Sanchez-Eppler observe in stating that sexuality “is also not fixed in place; sexuality is on the move” (2000:2). Although an inherently urban depiction of queer male identity might have been necessary at its inception into social science literature, the movement of sexuality out and away from metropolitan backdrops emerged as one of the key tenets of a reactionary and critical anti-urbanism paradigm. While some of the aforementioned scholars attribute queer community formation to urban contexts, others simply elevate metropolitan identity as quintessential for realization of queer male identity exploration. Regardless of the specific foundation for metronormative claims, they overvalue the urban as the main site of queer identity narratives.
Black and Rhorer (1995) contribute to the representation of Appalachian queer lives in the literature; their qualitative research helps explore defining features on how rural queers experience their lives and wrestle with identity formation; it concludes that the social isolation of rurality often contributes to internalized homophobia and fear. They further relay the importance of queer community attainment to identity formation, suggesting that at least one of their participants “sees himself as both insider and outsider,” a concept directly inspirational toward this work (Black and Rhorer 1995:77). Howard traces how “genders and sexualities in mid- and late-twentieth-century Mississippi prove fluid, both adhering to and defying myriad means of classification” (1999:306). His contribution is especially salient for its inclusion of race and class considerations, but also as a “means for reconfiguring dominant, homophobic narratives” on rural hostility toward queers (Howard 1999:175). Although he employs a somewhat queer theoretical approach, Howard nonetheless establishes a rural queer history, symbolism, and identity couched with interactive capabilities, such as the use of quiet accommodationism to contend with queer identities. In the rural South, Howard observes that “queer sexuality, while acknowledged and understood, would not be talked about” (ibid:184). Similarly, Johnson finds that rural communities regulate “queer eccentrics” through silences of “politeness” and “discretion,” whereby identity markers related to sexuality and gender are muted so as to maintain a veneer of inexplicit acknowledgement (2013:118). Testaments like these lend credence to anti-urbanist explorations of the queer past and present, building a confrontation with reductionist depictions of rurality as wholly antithetical to queer lives.

The works of many anti-urbanists run along a course of historiographical accounts and re-readings of rural queer lives. Howard claims that the very theoretical scale in studying rurality against a backdrop of queer urbanity requires a move “away from categories of
(bounded, confining) gay identity and community toward (potentially more open-ended, liberating) queer desires” (2016:320). However, by leaving queer identity and collectivities aside, this anti-urbanist paradigm relies on Seidman, et. al.’s definition of queer as a “refus[al] to take comfort in the embrace of any unitary, seamless identity” (2015:92). Relayed in the discussion of queer theory’s utility to the study of queer identities, this makes suspect some of the claims and findings anti-urbanists apply to their subject matter. If “queer” presumes a delimited non-identity, then that makes difficult the generalizability of anti-urbanists’ insisting on a more inclusive depiction of queer rurality. Instead, it seems more useful to explore and produce sociological works which account for queer identities so long as they continue to produce socially and culturally meaningful status differentiation. Conceptual dissonances, like that created in Howard’s quote, undo the anti-urbanist project by making illegitimate its claims to expand representations to rural queer identities. While the fluidity and longitudinality of identity play some part in larger sociological and sub-cultural narratives, when those identities become nullified through too strong of a theoretical claim about their transformative nature, then the applicability of findings evaporates away from the very sexual identities they hope to catalog.

More appropriate sociological studies have been done which directly account for queer lived identities in rural settings. Chief among them, Gray’s (2009) conclusions about visibility and queer rural youth come to mind as the type of anti-urbanist study which appropriately situates identity into the realities of a broader queer narrative. Foremost, she believes that space is “central to the understanding and articulation of identities” (Gray 2009:167). More directly informative of her population, “they walk this fine line amid cultural representations that heighten their sense of feeling out of place and a politics of visibility that fails to see them or their needs for different strategies of recognition” (Gray 2009:168). In this way, Gray parses out
queer youth identity as not only distinct from urban visibility politics, but one that demands a better finesse at navigating space, place and time. Barton confirms a similar set of obstacles for the Kentucky queers she studied: “being gay in the Bible Belt is full of institutional, social, and familial constraints that sideline the full participation of gay people in social life” (2012:223). Both scholars depict the lived realities of those whom they hope to represent and account for within a national dialogue of queer politics, visibility, and culture. It is this type of meaningful work that does not attempt to subvert existing rubrics of seeing and accounting for queer rurality, but shifts the discourse in such a way that alternative lived and performed identities become embedded in the larger queer narrative.

Another cogent research effort has been taken up by Preston and D’Augelli (2013). In studying the effects of rurality upon queer men’s lives, they develop a model for how their subjects cope with a conception of “not [having] experienced the opportunities urban life provides for gay men” (Preston and D’Augelli 2013: 148). This finding implies awareness to differences in queer community configurations and the role of spatiality in furnishing options for collectivity and solidarity. Their model operates off the negotiation of identity for rural queers. This research identified three groupings of identity variants: a primarily rural-identifying set of queer men, assimilationists, and primarily queer-identifying men. Those in the first group coped with lived experience by emphasizing rural identity and concealing queer identification; the second group negotiated dual identification, but also seemingly to the cost of queer identification; lastly, those who pursued queer identification tended to do so while they minimized their identification with rurality. A related vein of research by Eldridge, Mack, and Swank (2006) supports the claims of rural queers in perceiving higher rates of homophobia and strong implications for leading visible lives. To borrow from Jordan, “at times it can feel
impossible to belong to a place where one is inundated with messages that you don’t belong . . . where the notion of difference as sin [is] so heavy” (2015:44).

Following a similar trail to my own belief that “between the two ends of the continuum we are likely to see a range of identity management strategies that may not be captured well at the urban and rural poles,” Brekhus studies gay male suburbanites in New England (2003:10). His categorization of subjects into lifestyler, commuter, and integrator bears a resemblance to Preston and D’Augelli’s rural population, in that they formulated distinctive methods by which to rationalize and negotiate a queer identity within spatial surroundings. In fact, the lifestylers Brekhus mentions place high identity salience on their queerness, while integrators assimilate a queer identity into mixed or exclusively heterosexual spaces; finally, in the commuter role Brekhus describes those who adapt to primarily heterosexual surroundings, but “travel to identity-specific spaces to be their ‘gay’ self” (2003:28). In recognizing that “geography is both effect and cause of identity strategies,” he leaves open the possibility for collectivity of one sort of identity strategist over the others in certain environments (ibid:221). His findings obviously add to a better understanding of the complexities and dynamisms of identity formation and maintenance, but do not particularly address the types of geographies dealt with in Kentucky. Suburban spaces offer socio-economic and racial homogeneity, as well as decreasing reliance on the centrality of the urban core (Gottdiener and Hutchison 2011). Brekhus steps in the right direction by filling in the gaps left by queers studies’ dichotomy of sites; but suburbanite queers may not have much in common with men who live Kentucky’s cities.

As related so far, locations comparable to Lexington and Louisville, Kentucky have not been the sites of substantial work on queer identity (Gieseking 2016). Detamore (2010) establishes Appalachian gay networks as operatively distinct from those in more urban locations.
Though he included Lexington, Kentucky as a site for his study, his focus tends to fall upon the surrounding Appalachian areas and their socio-geographic network into and out of that city. Jones (2001) carefully examines the history of Lexington’s gay past through the twentieth century, cementing the city’s queer identity to its production of changing space over time. Fosl and Kelland explore the “intersectional political consciousness” of queer activism in Louisville, Kentucky (2016:14). Very little else has been done about the specific identities of queers lives in the quasi-urban areas of the Bluegrass State, even less so from a symbolic interactionist paradigm. As a result, this work provides an initial step to identifying the distinctiveness of queer men’s identities in Kentucky urban areas, but more importantly shifts the academic dialogue toward intermediate sites, as a tactic of bringing greater balance of queer studies from the sociological vantage point. My intent is to break the rural/urban binary by drawing out attention to queer identity narratives formed “in-between” those sites.
CHAPTER 3: THE STUDY -

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Herein, the term “queer” is employed as a categorical reduction of social-sexual identification; it means to include men who have sex with men, gay-identified men, males identifying as bisexual, the non-specific identification of queer and/or questioning, also accounting for men who identify more abstractly with the queer community. The constructionist interest of this work arises from radical feminism’s resistance to the imposition of men speaking on behalf of women’s issues (Farganis 2004). Therefore, the deliberately interpretive framework of this piece leaves open the narrative for lesbian, transgender, and other queer people to account for their own versions of identity. It is in this spirit of constructionism, rather than exclusion, that those populations are not included herein for analysis.

Research Question A: Does queer identity salience positively associate with locational identity distinction for this group?

Research Question B: In what ways does the Kentucky “urban” queer male perception of lived experience differ from that portrayed in metronormative and rural accounts?

Research Question C: In what specific ways and how do queer males living (or who have lived) in Lexington or Louisville, Kentucky perceive their identities in contrast to both rural and urban queer identities? And, to what extent do these men view their identity as socially, sexually, and locationally distinct from urban or rural populations?
Background for the Research Questions

In spite of attempts by anti-urbanist researchers and scholars to challenge metronormative assumptions, the existing literature and understanding of queer social identity leaves spatial gaps and cleavages, especially for quasi-urban or non-rural populations. To begin the process of filling in those gaps, the following questions and hypotheses were applied to a population of queer-identified men with ties to Lexington and/or Louisville, Kentucky.

Hypothesis A (corresponds to Research Question A)

Herein, queer identity salience represents an overall measure of the degree to which self-identified queer men in Kentucky express and adopt sexual orientation as an important role and status for themselves. Though not necessarily a role identity in its purest form, queer identification involves personal attachment to this particular social category (Brady and Kaplan 2009). Attachment requires the status commitment to any social group’s relational properties within society (Brady and Kaplan 2009). Such attachment serves as a form of social interaction in that such alignments require deliberate choice and bear social ramifications. Meanwhile, locational identity distinction refers to group perceptions of difference based on spatial, ethnic, cultural, social, and cognitive markers of importance to the individual. That is, individuals in the studied population notice or express a sense of difference between themselves and others based upon a host of socio-cultural factors. Identifying as queer produces one set of distinctions, but a counter-identity likely exists as a result of life experiences within a given environment, in this case, Kentucky urban areas. The resulting hypothesis holds that queer identity salience will positively associate with locational identity distinction for this population. If this hypothesis holds true, quantitative analysis of survey data should reveal correlations between these variables.
I aim to determine the degree to which respondents found the need for delineated queer space to also play into locational identity distinction. More clearly, do those respondents who express preference for uniquely queer space also show a commitment to a differentiated identity based on location? If a queer man presumes a need for queer social space, whether along the lines of informal social interaction with his socio-sexual peers, or in terms of a codified queer community, then it should follow that he also determines the social condition of Kentucky cities to be distinctive from other places with queer space. In part, this may be judged according to the quality of experiential offerings found in either space, or in relation to more interactive and cultural markers of the queer lived experience. A queer man who values the accessibility of social interaction should also be aware of differentials in urban, quasi-urban, and rural environments’ ability to grant such opportunities. Again, if this logic stands, quantitative analysis of the survey data will display positive correlations between the two categories of variables.

**Hypothesis B (corresponds to Research Question B)**

Queer men who have taken up residence in Lexington and/or Louisville, Kentucky should perceive their identities as fitting in-between the poles of urban and rural. Although the precise ways and extent to which they view their experiences have yet to be realized, it would seem that they are aware of the general meanings associated with their geographic and social positioning. The socially interactive phenomenon of identifying as queer carries with it specific purposes, just as does a migration to or from a rural setting. The study’s findings should reinforce the overall concept that even quasi-urban spaces allow for greater embrace and expression of the queer identity, though not necessarily to the exclusion of a rural identity. Along the continuum from rural to urban (or vice versa), residing in urban space that is not on
par with large metropolises establishes its own consequences and perceptions thereof. Paired, a queer and in-between identity may express itself in tension or perceived distinction from those queers residing along the extremes. If so, it means that queer men in Lexington and Louisville will not only be aware of the differences between themselves and others, but reconcile identities that seem at once contradictory and unbalanced.

_Hypothesis C (corresponds to Research Question C)_

The use of qualitative research will help determine how queer conceptions of urban and rural exist in relativity and perception. Since the population studied is embedded within identifiable and somewhat sizeable gay communities, respondents should express an awareness and preference for queer collectivity. However, that preference likely arises from competing perceptions about rurality, whether as an originating point for these men, or as a factor in their spatial surroundings. This should suggest that they conceptually identify apart from, though inherently connected to, both rural and urban queer existences. These findings pick up the distinct nature of social-sexual identity in a way that Detamore (2010) and others have missed: that as queerness is evoked in both rural and urban accounts, certain narratives and social identity constructions cannot be accounted for by the existing rubric. I hope to demonstrate that quasi-urban queer identity in Kentucky neither fully disengages with urban and rural accounts, nor is it firmly embedded in either identity perception.

By hypothetically viewing themselves as in-between (queer and urban/rural), queer men in Lexington and Louisville will negotiate identity in ways that compensate for this in-between status. Not only is the act of queer identification one embedded in role assumption, but so is the decision to identify as neither rural nor urban. It may be that some participants view a certain identity with reluctance, believing that the dual hallmark of queerness in rurality lowers status
potential. Opposingly, and perhaps more likely, queer men in these Kentucky cities may realize the status implications of their identities, but locate ways and means by which to negotiate and reconcile identity status. It may be that they patently reject metronormative assumptions of queerness as well as the stigma associated with rural upbringing. I would add that perceiving difference between themselves and other queers should present further opportunity to explore and present queer identity from the “middle” of the geographic continuum.

**Methods**

To obtain data on the ways in which queer men living in Lexington and Louisville, Kentucky perceive differences in their lived experiences, the Modified Measure of Role-Identity has been used to formulate a questionnaire (Callero 1992; Reid, Epstein, and Benson 1994). This adaptation of the Burke-Tully measurement (Burke and Tully 1977) allows for the capture of meaning of “the particular role in question” and “the self” (Callero 1992:490). According to Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston, and McDermott’s analytical framework for social identity content, the questionnaire will mean to determine participants’ cognitive model of social identity, exposing “descriptions of the social reality of the group” (2010:25). Self-administered questionnaires were utilized to determine patterns amongst research participants. Internet-based surveys were used to collect this data. In accordance with de Leeuw’s recommendations, pre-testing adjusted the overall content and makeup of survey questions (2008). Through the aid of social media, snowball sampling was used as the primary means of obtaining participants for the study. In accordance with Bryman’s (2012) guidance, this snowball sample is not intended to be random, nor wholly representative. This study acknowledges “that there is no accessible sampling frame for the population from which the sample is to be taken” (Bryman 2012:203). Additionally, the aim was for purposive sampling of queer males currently living in Lexington
and/or Louisville Kentucky, or having resided there in the recent past. The questionnaire elicited the necessary data to address the ways in which men in these locations view their lived experiences as divergent from both queer urban and queer rural populations. Questions for the survey were constructed so as to address one of three main theoretically relevant categories: queer identity salience, locational identity distinction, and delineated queer space.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to thematically identify and describe the ways in which queer-identified men in Lexington and Louisville portray their lived experiences. These interviews allow for the construction and emergence of significant social identity markers and how they relate to personal conceptions of spatiality. Regarding the interpretive process involved with the interviews, Iser mentions the “need for interpretation arises from the structure of interpersonal experience” (1989:31). Therefore, my own relationship to the subject matter should intensify this study’s ability to represent and characterize the lived experiences of those individuals with similarities in background and identity. Inherently, this research binds to the premise that “perception functions neither as factual recording nor as pure concoction” (Iser 1989:273). While perception and interpretation are subjectivist, both are widely recognized as constructive means to qualitative research and knowledge production in relation to disempowered or underrepresented social groups (Doucet and Mauthner 2008; Davis 2014; Meyer 2014). Analytical preference has been given to feminist interpretive methodologies based on researcher identification with the research subject and social phenomenon by considering the interview a “site where data [are] co-constructed” (Doucet and Mauthner 2008:335). Using Mabry’s recommendations, the “thick descriptions” of interviewees supply this study with unique “social realities as they are subjectively perceived, experienced, and created” within the context of identity and place (2008:218). Interview subjects were asked to respond along
biographical lines in hopes of eliciting how identity construction is negotiated along the axis of a queer identity; supported by Bornat, biographical methods are "particularly suited to understandings of oppression and marginalization," an especially salient mooring for this group of subjects (2008:348). The semi-structured interviews included questions and prompts related to negotiating queer identity, especially as it relates to residency in quasi-urban space; the questions allowed participants to explore their social identities in relationship to perceptions of place, sexuality, and ties between the two.

These semi-structured interviews focused on individual and group social-sexual identity, as depicted and qualified by the shared experiences and perceptions of study subjects. Attempts were made to garner rich accounts of how queerness interacts with living situations and their symbolic meanings. The interviews permitted collaborative, interpretive, and constructionist renderings of how sexual identity played a role in decisions to live in Kentucky's larger cities, and what meanings that sexual identity produced in relationship to other places, whether patently rural or abjectly metropolitan.

Research data from both the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were synthesized to determine the extent to which queer men living in Lexington and Louisville perceive themselves as dually queer: queer identified and in-between the literature's false binary of urban and rural. That synthesis also aims to supply a richer accounting of identity, using the subjects' own biographical arrangements.
Findings

Quantitative Analysis of the Questionnaire

The internet questionnaire was made available between September 1, 2016 and November 11, 2016. A direct internet link was shared via social media or email with potential research subjects, who were asked to share the link with others who might qualify to participate in the survey. In total, 56 respondents began the questionnaire within the defined timeline, but of those, 5 did not complete the questionnaire beyond providing informed consent, and thus were excluded from data analysis. A single participant’s responses were further excluded because he did not meet residency requirements of having ever resided in or around the Lexington or Louisville, Kentucky areas. Therefore, a total of 50 responses were considered viable for analysis. Briefly, the mean age of respondents is 42.16 years, with a span of ages ranging from 22 to 66 years. A total of 66 percent (33) of questionnaire respondents are married or committed, while 34 percent (17) consider themselves single. Once adjusted for residency requirements, 18 percent (9) currently lived in Lexington and 52 percent (26) in Louisville; however, the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) for Louisville reaches into multiple adjacent counties, including those in Indiana; adjusted to compensate for those respondents who live within its MSA, a total of 62 percent (31) live in or near Louisville. 14 percent (7) of respondents lived beyond Lexington’s MSA, but still within driving distance of no more than a few hours; all but 1 of those respondents had lived in Lexington or Louisville at some point.

The questionnaire, adapted from the Modified Measure of Role Identity, is set up to be self-coding. Employing a Likert scale for participants, responses are coded and scaled from a score of (−4) for Strongly Disagree to a (4) for Strongly Agree on each statement. Following
Callero’s (1992) and Reid, et. al.’s (1994) adaptations of standardized scales and values, each question also maps to a specific theoretically relevant variable, as explained below.

*Queer Identity Salience* is measured by the use of four statements specifically addressing the degree to which participants express and perceive their sexual orientation as a meaningful and important status.

*Locational Identity Distinction* is measured by a series of thirteen items. Each item relates, in some aspect, to a sense of spatial, ethnic, and socio-cultural markers significant from the standpoint of Kentucky’s urban locales. In other words, these items are designed to test for a spatially contextualized identity in Kentucky’s quasi-urban centers, precisely a counter-identity related to the particularities of space.

*Delineated Queer Space* is the final measure, involving four questions for significance, and one question representing non-significance. These items are composed to elicit the degree to which respondents perceive a need for designated queer space. The single question seen to demonstrate non-significance refers particularly to an equal comfort living with or without queer space.

Bivariate correlational data of the fifty (50) viable, complete questionnaires yields absolutely no meaningful relation between variables. For instance, a correlation of -0.753 was found between item 20 (I consider where I live to be an urban place) and item 22 (compared to other queer men, I live in a rural area); as well a correlation of 0.578 was found between items 21 (Where I live is not really urban or rural) and 28 (I feel in-between rural and urban in the place I live). Though these provide correlation significance at the 0.01 level, the best they offer is some comfort of measurement validity within the questionnaire and responses (Bryman
This being said, two adjustments were made to the data prior to conducting a second bivariate analysis: current city locations were re-coded to account for Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) classifications for Louisville, and responses from participants outside Lexington and Louisville MSAs were removed, thus reducing the participant responses to 39. No correlations at the 0.01 level and a Pearson Correlation score above 0.6 were encountered.

When variable categories are collapsed into the three theoretically relevant areas (e.g., queer identity salience, locational identity distinction, and delineated queer space), and scores tabulated for each set of items within each category, ANOVA t-test produces a resulting F-score of 3.917 (p=0.002) between responses to items in the queer identity salience category and those from the delineated queer space category. Table 1 displays these results.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QS b/w groups</td>
<td>349.409</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31.764</td>
<td>3.917</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W/I groups</td>
<td>218.950</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8.109</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>568.359</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative Analysis of the Interviews

Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted between October 1, 2016 and November 28, 2016. Three of the interviewees had previously completed the questionnaire, the remaining four had not. The ages ranged between 25 and 82; three of the men had lived in Louisville or its surrounding areas, two had lived exclusively in Lexington, and two men had lived in both places over the course of their lifetimes. Interviews ranged from under 18 minutes
to almost two hours. All interviewees identified as gay males, though two of them had sexual experiences with females at some point in life.

One of the most emergent and consistent themes amongst all interviewees is the sense of social-sexual openness they associate with urban environments. Though they did not consistently respond to the same questions with revelations on this perception of sexual and social freedom, they repeatedly point to the city as a source of liberty in relation to their experiences. Rod, a 25 year-old administrative assistant from Louisville mentions in relation to a trip to New York City, “you could be more expressive of yourself . . . I feel like people go there to be themselves.” When prompted to say whether or not he saw this specifically tied to the urban environment, he emphatically replied “yes!” Similarly, Malcolm, a 39 year-old therapist living in Louisville identifies a “gay culture to thrive in” as being one his main attractions to living in more urban spaces. Even when discussing his dating life, he specifically notes “I’ve suffered from living in Louisville. There’s some other cities where I think I would be way more [of] an eligible bachelor.” All the interview participants mention their use of the city as way of making contact, or losing contact from a social-sexual standpoint. Specifically, they all express a need or interest in escaping the confines of their hometowns and forging their identities away from home, though for some, that distance was more symbolic than geographic. For example, Rod grew up fairly close to Louisville, but describes his exit from home as being situated in the social opportunity of “going to the local gay gatherings,” something he characterizes as “life changing.”

To best illustrate the transitions mentioned by the interviewees, consider Henry, an 82 year-old retired accountant. After spending well into mid-life devoted to his parents and work, and having spent a significant amount of time living in Chicago, it is his life in Louisville that
opened the door to his queer sexual exploration and social revelation. "I would ride down here, at the time, back in the 1970s, mid-1970s, to Central Park and vicariously get a thrill out of watching those young men." Although he had socialized himself to both the all-male theatre shows in Chicago, as well as the male hustler scene in Louisville's older neighborhoods, he holds that he had no sexual activity prior to his father's death. Afterward, however, "this craze of things in my mind . . . wanting to do something to uh, engage . . . and then, it came to mind: these boys I'd seen parading their wares on 4th Street, Central Park, so I went." What is remarkable about him, as well as almost every other interviewee I spoke with, is that in spite of opportunities to engage sexually and socially, it is often the quasi-urban spaces of Kentucky that staged these introductions into queer socialization. That is not to suggest that all the interviewees had their initial queer contact in Kentucky, but that Lexington or Louisville is where many of them were realized, or subsequently came to fruition. Unlike metronormative and anti-urbanist accounts, these men found their social salvation in quasi-urban space.

Especially for the participants who had grown up in small towns, the sense of social-sexual freedom offered in Kentucky's quasi-urban spaces produces an attraction to those areas and the queer community growing out of them. Bob, a fifty-two year-old industrial maintenance worker notes that "Lexington was a lot of fun." As his first real contact with a codified and identifiable queer community, he had arrived in Lexington after his divorce. Of his home, he says there are "not as many options out there in [Hardin County]." Instead, Lexington is seen as "just about the right size" for his interests, "not too big and you can meet new people." This sentiment is echoed by Paul, a 39 year-old faculty member, also from Lexington. "Lexington is more socially progressive than a Southern city its size." But in addition to a political climate that seems more inviting, and perhaps more tolerant or accepting of queer identities, Paul iterates
"being in a town like this has allowed for more self-revelation and just more self-exploration.” He also characterizes Lexington as having “allowed for gay people to gravitate toward a city like it . . . there’s a drag scene here that’s been here for, you know, longer than most people even care or know about.” It seems that for these men, the tenants of a queer community help produce the necessary social parameters for leading a fulfilling life. Henry is especially adamant in putting forth the need for queer socialization: “My experience is this, try to find some socialization . . . if you have these feelings and are growing up alone, try to find some type of help through socialization.” No doubt, his own experience of being closeted for greater than half his life shapes his recommendations. Still, the message operates off the importance placed on queer socialization by these men. Yet, a related theme seems the lack of interest in much larger metropolises.

Although not all interview participants express this sense of preference for quasi-urban, or smaller-sized cities, most make at least some passing commentary on being most comfortable in Lexington or Louisville. Though a variety of factors seem to influence how each participant relates to Kentucky’s cities, size stands out in its embeddedness with queer socialization. Emmitt, a 43 year-old property management professional, and the most traveled of the group, insists that “I don’t think there is a larger city, like LA or Las Vegas, or New York where you can . . . [experience] a comradery, a collective idea” to making friends. For him, like several other participants, the size and background of other queers living in Louisville and Lexington permits and encourages the development of long-lasting and strong social bonds. While it may be that such close, personal connections occur throughout queer communities, irrespective of geography, for these men, the two factors could not be readily disentangled. However, that particular tie to other themes may help explain why comfort seems so high in these locations that
permit contact with a queer community, but are not on par with the metropolises most often affiliated with the queer male narrative. Paul broadens this concept into arguing that “there’s something about being a Kentuckian, that, you know, is bred into you a very early age . . . it’s hard to leave.” Indeed, for immigrants like myself, the allure of Kentucky is not one easily shaken or dismissed, whether seen through socio-cultural or geographic frames of reference.

Oftentimes participants firmly situate living in Lexington or Louisville to closeness with family. Although their family’s religious backgrounds seem a divisive and tenuous obstacle to experiencing full acceptance of their queer identity, these men prefer proximity to family. Darrell, 45, who stood out as the most conflicted with his family’s religious beliefs, intentionally returned to Louisville after his time in military service. In part, this was out of a pursuit of fuller acceptance from them. When prompted to discuss his needs in feeling closer to his family, he specifically mentions “that I’m not a bad person, that I’m not evil. I’m not a product of the devil. I have a lot to contribute.” Paul, who attended graduate school in Atlanta, returned to Lexington because he sees outside that “a confluence of politics, religion, and just the lack of exposure to other people, and how they live and how they see the world” which was largely unattractive to him. Similarly, Malcom says that “once I was in college, I decided I wanted to stay close to my family, but be in some sort of city situation.” Cutting across generational and educational gaps, these men seek and pursue queer social outlets within Kentucky’s quasi-urban space, but do not resort to abandonment of their home state. Even Henry, who grew up Illinois, remarked, “well, I think Louisville is more open than I expected.” It would seem, at least based on these accounts, that each man experiences Kentucky’s cities as a culmination of his need for queer networks and social outlets, as well as a space that keeps him close to various forms of “roots” within the state. For Emmitt, those roots are entangled with lifelong friendships with other queer men; Bob, a
little differently, sees importance in maintaining a relationship with his daughter, while Rod refers to a more abstract concept, having stated “these are my roots, so I think that’s the most important thing for me.” These types of findings imply a certain social mooring to traditionally rural conceptions of family, duty, and place.

As much as fear constructs a darker theme to these men’s narratives, it is not necessarily the driving force to place them in Lexington or Louisville. Instead, the availability of queer networks and social opportunities pull them toward these quasi-urban spaces; fear, from their own accounts, is what helped encourage them to look outside their native towns and cities. Perhaps the two best case studies for this discussion and exploration of fear are Henry, the octogenarian from Illinois, and Emmitt, a man who spent nearly two decades in the Christian ministry. In both cases, the men had an almost endless supply of other cities in which to live. Emmitt had lived and traveled internationally, while Henry lived in Chicago and could have made a home almost anywhere, given his travels and education level. However, both men experienced fear of being outed, of revealing a sexual orientation those surrounding them could not effectively accept, at least as conveyed to them by a combination of silence or outright vocalization concerning same-sex attraction. Henry recounts a trip as a young man to a local park where gay men gathered. “I was sitting next to my dad, and I’ll never forget, they were gay, actually . . . and one of them talked, what did he say? ‘Well, I’m going to sit next to the best looking guy I see down here.’ I thought, ‘My God, I hope he don’t pick me.’ Now why the hell . . .” His fear of other queer men centered on what kinds of information they might have or suspect about him, a horrifying titillation Henry worked to avoid. In spite of his familiarity with more public domains of male sexuality (i.e., all-male theatres, adult bookstores, etc.), Henry maintained his celibacy through repression until his father’s death, at which time he remarks “for
the very first time, I was alone. Totally alone. No responsibilities, except for myself.” The veil of fear from familial judgment lifted, Henry describes his own ascent into more abject queer socialization as “a whirlwind. I reaped a whirlwind.” Though perhaps we could brush away such a comment as feigning dramatic, what Henry describes to me about the alleviation of his fears shows a man finally, at age 44, developing a social-sexual identity. He acknowledges that his “whirlwind” often caught him up in sub-cultural practices and norms he did not fully understand right away. Though that late introduction into Louisville’s queer life in the late ’70s and ‘80s may seem too dated to carry much meaning to some, his story ran parallel with what several other subjects relate: the geographical and socio-cultural differences that could be attained by residence in Kentucky’s quasi-urban spaces invited opportunities at queer socialization not attainable in other areas. Obviously, that is not unique to these places, but I would argue it adds depth to the rootedness many of these men assign to their decisions to stay in or relocate to Kentucky.

Emmitt, on the other hand, remained closeted for what he described as 30 years, due in large part to his work as a minister. Still, when he had begun to explore his queer social-sexual identity, he did so on an international scale. One observation he makes, which speaks loudly to his perception of difference and fear, is that “going back home and know that you’re just kind of loathed . . . over there [Europe], it was a lot less of a burden. Back home, it was a burden.” That also makes his decision to live in Louisville one that would seem burdensome in comparison to similar options, including living abroad. Yet, Emmitt’s opportunities to “run amok” as a closeted man abroad failed to fulfill his desires and needs: “My heart was always at Louisville because it was my home, it was where I grew up. You know, I wanted to be there and meet somebody and settle down and, you know, have a good life.” Although he sees Louisville’s
queer culture as “not that cooperative” with him, he patently supports notions of making positive change for its queer community and youth. In fact, both he and Henry were the only participants to specifically respond with positive recommendations for the queer community in Lexington and Louisville when I ask if they have any parting thoughts. They both call for the importance of queer community support and resource building. That aside, choosing the particulars of Kentucky’s quasi-urban space imparted by both men, as well as the other respondents, with a sense of queer identity that simultaneously does not require one couched in fear. And precisely Lexington and Louisville are the locations sought out by these men, to experience and share a more complete version of their identity.

Finally, the theme of religious intolerance dominates the interviews with these men. As described briefly earlier, Darrell, who works in real estate, finds that he could not disentangle his coming out story from his family’s religious background. He says “as far as going and being out in public bars, things like that, I still remained hidden for many, many years . . . once I realized that the family truly had peace with me, I was ok.” The most painful experiences, and the very nexus to which these men point as an obstacle of their acceptance is religion, generally framed as Christianity. Rod and Malcolm both express relief that they had not been pressured into religion by their families, yet both also see quasi-urban space in Kentucky as surrounded by religious intolerance. For several of the interview subjects, this religious intolerance and unfavorable view of “rednecks” ran together. When prompted, Emmitt defines a “redneck” as a mentality based in “ignorance and lack of understanding.” It is the fear that religion and “redneck” ideology create which makes other parts of Kentucky, including their hometowns, uninviting for these men. The hostility they experienced through bullying or harassment in school, as well as the conditioned fear they had toward their own families’ reactions to having a gay relative
effectively serve to disempower them. It is no wonder, based on the trials and concerns of these men, that any of them seek a more comfortable space through which to explore their queer identities. Furthermore, as Emmitt so succinctly portrays it, “it’s not easy being green, and it’s even harder being queer.”

*Synthesis and Triangulation*

In comparing quantitative results of the questionnaire with the qualitative content of the interviews, there exists the common thread of high queer identity salience and expressed interest in delineated queer space. Though the only mathematical support for this occurs once scores were summed according to thematically relevant categories of items, the interview content drives home the assertion that this population of queer men places substantial meaning on their queer identity and extend that to their environments. Given the perceived or experienced social hostility mentioned by the participants, it stands to reason that queer identity sets them apart from heterosexual counterparts, and that this process helps generate their need for specifically queer spaces. Though not entirely sexual in its nature, several interview participants speak of sexual opportunity as one mode by which such queer space is experienced or embodied. Perhaps more so, these men seek out locations that serve their queer identity and need for queer socialization by a measure of convenience. That is, since the majority of queer men interviewed, and who completed the questionnaire originated in Kentucky, they follow a trajectory that does not more fully interrupt their relations with family. None of the interviewees specifically frame the decision that way, but certainly reference a nearness and rootedness to family as a contributing factor. Still, the matter remains that they consider Kentucky as much a part of their identity as their emergent (or emerging) queer identity—at least as it applies to those who grew up within the state.
Though Hypothesis A is only partially supported by questionnaire responses, it does seem that some correlation exists between this population's strong queer identity salience, the degree to which a queer role status is perceived as important, and the population's preference for delineated queer space. Although conclusions cannot be drawn from the questionnaire responses in terms of relationships to locational identity status, that is, the group perceptions of difference based off spatial, ethnic, cultural, social, or cognitive markers, it seems that the qualitative portion of this study somewhat supports the notions of that hypothesis. More concretely, the queer men interviewed often make mention of Lexington's or Louisville's unique status in providing some form of social relief in what is largely described as socio-culturally and politically conservative surroundings. Thus, they may not necessarily express their views in ways which expose a clear sense of locational identity, but they tend to summarize a semblance of such locational identity in their biographies and accounts. Furthermore, the questionnaire may not have been constructed in a way that sufficiently captures or standardizes those elements for participants.

However, the seven men interviewed for this study tend to both support some of the notions of the metronormative paradigm, and also defy them. For example, like many narratives and descriptions from a metronormative paradigm, all the interview subjects express at least some belief or experience regarding the hostility and unsuitability of rural life for them. Henry, who has not lived in any particularly rural area throughout his life, surmises that "if you went to a rural area, I think you'd be more secluded in your thoughts, as far as expressing them. You'd be afraid to express them unless you had someone of like nature." Those rural expatriates interviewed seem to also share a rather dismal view of queer life opportunities in more rural areas. Paul, who grew up in a rural area of Kentucky, says "but had I grown up, had I lived
continually in Knox County, Paintsville, or Whitesburg, or something like that, had I spent all these years, my whole life there, I think that it would have made a difference [in my queer identity].” To a large degree, this supports a metronormative conditioning that paints rural areas as antithetical to queer identity. Conversely, the men interviewed for this study defy metronormative valuation of large metropolises. All participants have visited at least one large metropolitan area, and only Rod, the youngest participant, shows any strong interest in pursuing a life in New York. Most often, interviewees struggle to think of larger places they might want to live, or eliminate their own suggestions as they make them. This defies metronormative portrayals which strongly favor places like New York and San Francisco. Neither did the men who have spent their time in Lexington or Louisville see those places as significantly lacking in terms of queer socio-cultural opportunities, nor did any express a particular preference for larger cities. In fact, I argue a reverse finding emerged: these men either openly prefer Kentucky’s quasi-urban spaces or allude to comforts of residing therein. In all, these findings and themes support the assertion that these queer men remain aware of differences between themselves and queers in larger cities, but envision such distinctions as serving their own personal and social ends. As stated within Hypothesis B, participants relate that quasi-urban spaces in Kentucky afford a greater embrace and expression of their queer identity, but not to a significant exclusion of any rural roots they may bear.

Not only does the qualitative data in this study support queer collectivity preferences, but so does the quantitative analysis of theoretically relevant categories. Though it would seem that the men interviewed for this study ascertain some degree of being in-between rural and urban, they generally fail to prioritize that as particularly meaningful. Instead, all favor their queer social-sexual identity as a master status in relating to lived space and socialization opportunities.
To a moderate degree, interview participants differentiate as somewhat distinct along the axes of social, sexual, and locational identity. As just mentioned, their interests are bound in the interplay between sexual and social identity, though they specifically cite their families and rootedness in the region as key parts of choosing to live in Lexington and Louisville. It would be reasonable to suggest that these queer men perceive their identities as more similar to urban queers than rural queers. This argument rests upon the idea, communicated by several respondents, that queer socialization acts a healthy portion of identity development. Not only does Henry support this view with his reference to the necessity of seeking out queer social outlets, but so do all other respondents, who mention that personal acceptance, socialization, and a sense of community make the greatest differences in their lives. Those requirements of acceptance, socialization, and a sense of community are patently devoid in their depictions of rural areas. Reflecting on their accounts, whether the interviewee had been reared in a rural environment, or whether he had grown up in more urban areas made no difference; all associate rurality with a sense of social-sexual isolation and lack of development. This largely defies the assertions of a host of anti-urbanist scholars, who offer a view of queer rurality as a somewhat thriving, non-normative alternative. Of course, it may be that the men interviewed disfavored rural life long before they departed from it. On the other hand, all who had lived in a rural setting tend to frame their struggles with the conservative religiosity and politiems of smaller towns. They suggest that a certain withdrawal is required for living in rural areas, in some cases social ostracism. Their portrayals do not necessarily challenge the plurality found within anti-urbanist accounts, but they do offer an alternative view, making rural living for queers the antitydyl. However, unlike some of the forerunners of metronormativity, these men do not generally attempt to assert an element of cosmopolitanism or superiority into their sway toward more
urban space. This implies less preoccupation with elevating the urban, but a more balanced view of living very much between those two worlds. Since all but two of the interviewees grew up in smaller locations, they are not only less prone to arbitrarily inflate the significance of an urban lifestyle, but are more critical of the ideologies and traditional social forces they see as directly forming rural communities. If anything, their socio-political interests are more at play than any sense of social status awarded by urban living. For these men, it is imperative to experience delineated queer space as part of the socialization process. Any further value judgments do not seem to come to play in their biographical sketches.

Finally, for the queer men who informed this project, Lexington and Louisville are not queered by their in-between presence of urbanity within swaths of rurality. Instead, these men queer the quasi-urban space precisely because of the queer social networks and spaces allotted to queer identification. Rod proclaims that Louisville “helped me to grow into the gay man I am now.” Malcolm thinks, “it’s really nice to see a gay couple go down the street holding hand[s]” in Louisville, while Paul imagines Lexington to be a beacon for queers in smaller communities.
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION -

Responding to metronormative valuation of metropolitan queer accounts, anti-urbanists pave the way to expanding narratives and sites beyond places and populations of historical interest in studying queer male identity. These efforts to form more inclusive and representative depictions of queer identity often focus so strongly on rural study sites that they miss the in-between spaces of queer collectivity. In leaving aside populations which inhabit in-between locations, perceptual and symbolic nuances of queer male identity become only partially more whole and pluralistic. The paradigm shift of the past twenty years, from urban to rural, leaves opportunity for queer identity scholars to enhance our understanding of unique experiences, narratives and discourses not neatly bound into a false dichotomy of rural-urban. My contribution to that literature presumes that the underrepresented views and accounts of queer men in Kentucky quasi-urban space belong in the framework of "cultural and ethnographic studies of subjugated knowledges and peoples" (Sholock 2007:140). As such, like many queer men residing in-between the rural and urban, I recognize our lack of visibility and representation in the current rift between queer identity study sites. Therefore, through this work, I challenge other queer identity scholars to take up the cause of locating queer identity where it exists, much as the anti-urbanist camp has accomplished for contemporary and historic target populations of the hinterlands.

Foremost, I assess the degree to which queer-identified men in Lexington and Louisville, Kentucky accept their social-sexual identity as particularly important in their social lives. Based off of personal experiences and larger social discourses about Kentucky and its association with rurality, I ask if study subjects sense a particular social identity based on their geographic, cultural, and social ties to Kentucky's largest cities. This leads into my efforts at qualifying the
perceptions of these queer men in relation to larger queer narratives historically situated in urban areas, and an emerging and more recent development of queer rurality. Whereas the urbanite queer men I encountered in Chicago seemed to associate Kentucky backgrounds with rurality and Southern cultural in general, my high school friend saw Lexington and Louisville as analogs for rurality in other areas. In other words, both internally and externally, the existence of queer identity of all shapes within Kentucky becomes entangled with larger generalizations and devaluations within the queer narrative. Neither are such conclusions and associations drawn from tangible evidence, nor are they reflective of experiences queer men give of living in Lexington or Louisville. This claim should help support research efforts that aim for increasing representativeness and plurality in constructing and augmenting socio-cultural queer identity narratives.

My research is obviously limited in its generalizability to other in-between spaces. However, this limitation concomitantly illustrates the need for expanded study sites and populations which can add to a more inclusive accounting of queer experiences. Furthermore, the smaller number of participants truncates an ability to apply forthcoming conclusions to queer men in similar, but different geographical locations, queer-identified women, the transgender community and others. Because of these limitations, future scholarship ought to focus on smaller cities and other forms of in-between space; it should also construct a broader view which includes other sub-populations of sexual minority groups. Lastly, lesbian, gay, transgender, and queer studies must complete the identity work it started several decades ago. Social sciences have not yet garnered all they can from studies of sexual identity, as demonstrated by the holes within scholarship on the subject. Scholars like Brekhus identify the need for suburban queer male identity studies, and Barton highlights the intersection of conservative religious influence
over queer sexual identity in the Bible Belt; so too, my work impinges on the value judgments
and identity assumptions of other queer identity scholars and larger socio-cultural commentary
that exclude and ignore certain constituents of the queer community. At once, the findings and
conclusions of my work may not be any more surprising than those drawn from other queer
identity scholars. Nevertheless, what makes these sorts of research valuable is their ability to
generate representational accounts of queers as a subjugated minority group; even more
compelling, this sort of scholarship provides visibility to factions of queers largely ignored
within their own national-level community. My work begins the process of filling in blanks left
by a paradigm shift in queer locational identity (from urban to rural), which left many of our
perceptions, narratives, and experiences de-normalized. Metronormativity normalized the urban
queer identity to sites like San Francisco and New York. Anti-urbanists continue to challenge
that normative tendency, but have not bothered to consider the pockets of queer subjects
collected in quasi-urban areas. And while we may appear relationally archetypal of the rural to
urban migration assumptions found in metronormative value judgments, our accounts are even
more underrepresented than those of rural queers.

The queer men who inform this research demonstrate high levels of queer identity
salience. They further show a preference for delineated queer space, especially in relationship to
where they choose to make their homes. Beyond that, they echo the challenges of Barton’s
subjects in growing up amongst conservative religious and political institutions they see at odds
with their social-sexual identity (2012). Much like Preston and D’Augelli’s findings on rural
queers, these quasi-urbanites do not associate rurality with identity fulfillment potential (2013).
For these queer men, visibility arises from the collectivity and availability of specifically queered
spaces in their quasi-urban environments. Most do not profess an attraction to larger
metropolises; they express rootedness and comfort in the opportunities afforded them in Lexington or Louisville. Furthermore, their expressed perceptions mimic the population studied by Black and Rhorer (1995), contending with fear of religious and political intolerance, tying social-sexual identity to a sense of queer community access, and finding rurality an unattractive alternative site for enacting queer identity.

By locating and then inhabiting the delineated queer space available to them in Kentucky's cities, the queer men of this population display a preference for delineated queer space, depicted as belonging to particular queer social networks; others envision such delineated space as anchored to structures of queer socialization, such as bars, bookstores, and informal meeting places. For each of them, it stands out that the opportunity and availability for such socializing hallmarks the existence of delineated queer space and some degree of community acceptance. Lexington and Louisville offer those options for these men, and often that seems enough for the maintenance and construction of deep social bonds, hence their collective references to rootedness in the region. Furthermore, their treatment of quasi-urban space illustrates a preference of it over surrounding, rural areas. According to their accounts, socially, politically, and religiously conservative institutions outside the quasi-urban bounds help produce a hostile environment in which these men do not sense an ability to live out their queer identities. For this reason, they queer the quasi-urban space in which they reside, not only from enacting their queer identities in performative ways, but also in locating and staking out the tenets of a queer community therein. Along this line of perception, they distinguish themselves from rural queers, who they see as lacking in key identity formation through queer socialization. While the respondents most often reject the idea that metropolises offer a superior quality of queer interaction, they simultaneously favor the size and relative ease with which they can relate to
other queer men in Lexington or Louisville. In a way, this suggests an element of recognizing and embracing an in-between social identity, though without moorings built from a geographic basis. Instead, this in-between identity is depicted as one established in socio-cultural, political and secular forms.

Informants for this research neither shy away from, nor hesitate to associate themselves with rural upbringings if the circumstance applies to them. When sharing the course of life events which led them to the present, they expose a stronger interest for how their queer identity plays into relationships, political views, and a rejection of social conservativism. They do not disengage with rurality, nor particularly express an urban cosmopolitanism often favored by metronormative accounts. Coupled with their expressed interests in delineated queer space, this speaks to a layered need and desire for familiarity and anonymity, whereby strong bonds may be formed with queer institutions and persons, but sufficient distance can be maintained with hostile social and religious institutions. These men consider quasi-urban space non-normative in contrast to Kentucky's surrounding rurality. That non-normativity aligns with their strong queer identity salience in supplying the necessary queer social contacts seen as unavailable elsewhere, including metropolises some of these men conceive of as socially and structurally unwieldy. Therefore, these queer Lexingtonians and Louisvillians do conceptually and socially distinguish themselves from urban and rural populations, though not entirely in a voluntary sense. Malcolm asserts fairly strongly that “I always tell people I’m from Louisville, I don’t like Kentucky... the state itself is just so backwards.” Such sentiments are not unique to him, and correspond with a metronormative valuation of urbanity, as well as a larger cultural depiction of Kentucky as inherently flawed and outmoded. Yet Malcolm, like other participants, handily rejects finding similar warmth and relatability in larger cities. It seems, then, that this population of queer men
see quasi-urban space in Kentucky as distinct from, yet undeniably connected to other parts of the Bluegrass State.

In summary, the visibility so firmly attached to a metronormative queer politic exists only so far as to appropriate more accepting social institutions and opportunities which favor queer collectivization. The study subjects’ locational identity distinction rests against a preference for developing meaningful relationships with romantic partners, friends, family, and socio-economic opportunities. These men cement expression of their sexual identity with queer socialization opportunities, while also maintaining that the greatest difference rests between them and those whom they view as isolated and out of touch with the queer collectivity available in Lexington and Louisville. I conclude that the importance of queer delineated space rests with its socializing opportunities, all of which further the chance for these men to engage with political and socio-cultural structures reflective of their shared sexual identity.
APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE

Queer Identity Salience:
- Compared to people in general, the life experiences of queer-identified men are very different.
- Being a queer-identified man is an important part of who I am.
- I consider myself part of the queer community.
- Queer men consider Kentucky to be a rural place.

Locational Identity Distinction:
- Compared to queer men who live in big cities, I have a lower quality of social life.
- Compared to queer men who live in small towns, I have a better quality of social life.
- Living in a large city is unattractive to me.
- Living in a small town is attractive to me.
- Where I live is not really urban or rural.
- I consider where I live to be an urban place.
- Compared to other queer men, I live in a rural area.
- I would never want to live in a big city.
- I can relate to queer men who live in large cities.
- I can relate to queer men who live in small towns.
- Being a queer man in the place I live is different from bigger and smaller cities/towns.
- I feel in-between rural and urban in the place I live.
- My social identity is in-between rural and urban.

Delineated Queer Space:
- Where I choose to live is influenced by being a queer man.
- Having access to a queer community makes a difference in where I choose to live.
- Most queer men live in large cities.
- I could just as easily live in the country as the city. (Non-significance)
APPENDIX II: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about the place you grew up.
2. How was your childhood there?
3. What other places would you have wanted to live as a child?
4. How would you describe your upbringing?
5. At what point in life did you decide to move away and why?
6. How would you describe your experiences since moving away?
7. What did you hope to gain from moving away?
   What did you hope to lose?
8. Which large cities have you visited?
9. What were your experiences like there?
10. Why do you live in your current city? What keeps you there?
11. If you could live anywhere else, where would it be and why?
12. What is the most important thing to you about living in Kentucky?
13. How has being a queer man been affected by living where you do?
14. How does living in a city in Kentucky differ from living in a bigger city?
15. How does living in a city in Kentucky differ from living in a small town?
16. What makes being queer in Lexington/Louisville different from living elsewhere?
17. What do you see as the queer experience of living in Kentucky?
REFERENCES


the Interior. Retrieved October 11, 2016 - (https://www.nps.gov/articles/series.htm?id=4DF8155-1DD8-B71B-OB4C2713F34E2A5C)


VITA

Kevin Blane Shields was born and raised in Greenbrier Country, West Virginia. He graduated from Greenbrier East High School and entered Berea College, where he studied psychology. He later graduated Summa Cum Laude from Kentucky Wesleyan College with a baccalaureate degree in General Studies, including emphases in behavioral and social sciences, English literature, and the humanities. He also holds an associate degree in Health Information Technology from Weber State University.

During his undergraduate studies, Kevin obtained a strong interest in facets of sociological thought and theory. Given his background with studying criminology and criminal justice at Kentucky Wesleyan, Morehead’s graduate program stood out as an obvious choice.

Kevin has spent approximately six years teaching at the community college level and has been accepted into the Doctorate of Arts in English Literature, Pedagogy and Technology at Murray State University, where he intends to specialize in minority, gender, and sexuality canons.