

Places or Polygons? Governmentality, Scale, and the Census in *The Gay and Lesbian Atlas*

Michael Brown^{1,*} and Larry Knopp²

¹Department of Geography, University of Washington, Box 353550, Seattle, WA 98195-3550, USA

²Department of Geography, University of Minnesota, Duluth, MN 55812-3006, USA

ABSTRACT

This paper responds to recent calls for a Foucauldian population geography by critically analysing the 2004 *Gay and Lesbian Atlas* (a US-oriented product of demographers at Washington, DC's Urban Institute, a public policy 'think tank'). We employ a framework that foregrounds issues of governmentality, sexuality, gender and scale to explore how both the *Atlas* and the 2000 US Census from which the *Atlas*'s data are drawn socially construct, for governmental purposes, certain sexualised populations and spaces. We pay particular attention to the power of scale-framing in this process by varying the spatial scales at which location quotients for same-sex households are situated for census tracts in Seattle. Following the *Atlas*'s classification and coding algorithms, we show how the resulting cartography can reveal elements of a population that has previously been invisible in the census – but only relative to certain larger scales. The question of scale therefore becomes an important matter of governmentality, rather than solely a technical issue. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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INTRODUCTION

As the so-called 'culture wars' rage across American society (and to some extent European and other societies as well), a central theatre of combat has been the legal status of gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals, relationships and practices. Whether pitched as issues of red-states versus blue-states in the US (Sperling *et al.*, 2004; Frank, 2004), traditionalists versus modernisers everywhere (Ormond and Cole, 1996; O'Reilley and Webster, 1998), or competing moral visions of the individual, family, community and nation (Weston, 1991; Brown *et al.*, 2005), the visibility/invisibility and recognition/non-recognition of non-heterosexual individuals, relationships and practices are inevitably questions of population geography. But they are also, obviously, political.

Since censuses define and officially measure salient social relationships and categories on behalf of government authorities, and frame and inform public policy through a complex 'politics of numbers' (Legg, 2005: 143), they are deeply implicated in these politics. In this paper, we focus particularly on the United States Census of population, its use by some social scientists seeking to 'uncloset' gays and lesbians (Black *et al.*, 2000; Gates and Ost, 2004), and the practices that Foucault (1991, 1997), Legg (2005) and others (e.g. Gordon, 1991; Dean, 1999; Rose, 1999) call 'governmentality'.

We do this through a critical examination and reworking of the epistemological and ontological work done by a 2004 publication titled *The Gay and Lesbian Atlas* (Gates and Ost, 2004). The *Atlas* represents a self-conscious effort to make visible same-sex couples in the US Census and, by exten-

*Correspondence to: M. Brown, Department of Geography, University of Washington, Box 353550, Seattle, WA 98195-3550, USA. E-mail: michaelb@u.washington.edu

sion (although indirectly and very imprecisely), other gay, lesbian and bisexual people in US society (see also Black *et al.*, 2000). Linking population and political-cultural geographies, we argue that the *Atlas* raises important questions about the spatiality of governmentality – in this case, the role of governmentality in the construction of *the closet*.¹ A key element of this role is the construction of *scale*. We consider both the ways in which governmentality is evident in the *Atlas*'s own acceptance of state-produced constructions of scale (and other sociospatial codings, such as the closet), and the implications of *shifting* scales in various statistical and cartographic manipulations used by the *Atlas*'s authors to represent (certain) gay and lesbian populations.

We observe that in using the Census to resist the closet, Gates and Ost unwittingly (and inevitably) reproduce certain aspects of it. Our purpose, however, is not to reject or dismiss Gates and Ost's work, but rather to build on and extend it by offering an alternative perspective on their population geography. As such, we hope to enrich critical approaches to population geography generally and raise the profile of population studies in critical geography – a part of the discipline that remains tightly anchored in post-structuralism rather than quantitative or realist approaches.

The argument of this paper proceeds in three steps. Firstly, we situate our critique as an extension of recent calls by Legg (2005) and Philo (2005) for how population geography may draw on, and contribute to, Foucault's concept of governmentality, but also as part of an ongoing project to re-theorise population geography more generally. Next, we explicate the methods and cartography of the *Atlas*, in order to specify how it relies unreflexively, and thereby governmentally, on state-given scales. We illustrate the constructedness and reifications of that scale, by demonstrating how the concentration patterns themselves are variable, and contingent upon the scale at which the maps and location quotients are situated. Lastly, we draw out the implications of our analysis for both population and critical geographies.

A FRAMEWORK FOR CRITIQUE

This research draws on several quite diverse, yet increasingly intersecting, strands of literature

across critical human geography. Most generally, it responds to calls through the past decade or so for a more theoretically engaged population geography. This is part and parcel of an even larger and increasingly sophisticated engagement between theoretical-critical and empirical-quantitative geographers more broadly (Dixon and Jones, 1998; Barnes and Hannah, 2001; Hannah, 2001; Kwan, 2002). Since early critiques (White and Jackson, 1995; Graham, 2000) argued that population geography's empiricism limited its intellectual ken, several population geographers have called for – and provided – greater theoretical engagement over the past decade (Graham and Boyle, 2001; Silvey, 2004; Underwood-Sem, 2001).

One means towards this goal has been a rising interest in the epistemological and ontological questions implicit in the framing and representing of populations on the part of political and cultural geographers (Bailey, 2005). Nowhere has the move been more apparent than in geographers' increasing interest in governmentality (Murdoch, 1997; Abram *et al.*, 1998; Hannah, 2000; Philo, 2001, 2004, 2005). 'Governmentality' refers to a particular form of state power that is exercised when citizens self-discipline by acquiescing to a wide variety of state knowledges, including about population and territory (Gordon, 1991; Dean, 1999; Rose, 1999). Often referred to as 'the conduct of conduct', or 'the mentality of governance', Foucault (1991, 1997) associates governmentality with the demise of the sovereign and the rise of modern, liberal democratic and capitalist societies. It stands in marked contrast to the legitimate use of force, which is the standard, classical conceptualisation of state power. When we see ourselves through state knowledges, this 'biopower' (or 'biopolitics') impels us to wilfully and unwittingly conform to particular ways of being. These knowledges are then structured and reproduced through citizens' actions that are based on such framings. As an obvious means by which individuals see – and govern – themselves, through its optics, the Census is a quintessential example of such power.

On the specific question of sexuality in the Census, Brown with Boyle (2000) used the concept of governmentality to demonstrate the materiality of the closet in the workings of the nation-state. They showed how a particular

governmental vision of its population works to reveal and conceal same-sex households through the American and British censuses. This simultaneous revelation and concealment, they argue, is an unavoidable consequence of the assumptions that must be made in order to 'see' same-sex couples in the Census. For instance, the assumption that same-sex household members who identify in the census as 'unmarried partners' are gay or lesbian necessarily closets non-gay and lesbian householders who nonetheless see their relationships as 'partnerships'.² Similarly, in the British Census, data-cleaning techniques and the lack of familiarity with same-sex couples means that British census officials have had to closet some same-sex couples by recoding them, in order to maintain a consistent definition of household relation. So to preserve 'reliability', the Census governmentally closeted certain households, thereby forsaking validity.

A recent paper by Legg (2005) and a commentary by Philo (2005), however, provide a much more thoroughgoing and helpful framework with which to appreciate how governmentality works through population geographies based on the Census, like the *Atlas*. Legg's call for increased attention towards governmentality is staked through two distinct yet related arguments. Firstly, he clarifies the multiple dimensions of governmental processes in state knowledges by outlining five distinct *analytical levels* at which governmentality can be recognised (episteme, visibility, identities, *techne* and *ethos*). The analytic of *episteme* refers to modes of conceptualising and interrogating population. It refers to particular lexicons, jargons, and routine practices of truth-telling and knowledge production. Legg's emphasis on episteme inspires our empirical analysis below. How a population's salient features are represented back to its elements is what Legg calls *visibility*. The term calls attention to the means by which certain dimensions of a population are highlighted, while others are occluded. *Identities* in governmental analysis are 'the epistemological conception of people to be governed; their statuses and capacities; the shaping of agency and direction of desire' (Legg, 2005: 148). In the context of the *Atlas* (and the Census), for example, there are no gay or lesbian individuals. There are only same-sex couple households. These couples cohabitate in a single household at a single address, whose

location can be pinpointed at no finer spatial scale than that of the census tract. Identity and geography, therefore, are always-already and irrevocably linked in the *Atlas*.³ *Techne* refers to the actual mechanisms through which rule is accomplished. It specifies the technologies by which governmental power intervenes in framing a population; the various techniques and technologies of counting, tabulating and summarising 'data' in the census (and in the *Atlas*) are examples. Finally, *ethos* refers to 'the moral form which distributes tasks in relation to ideals or principles of government' (pp. 148–9). A particularly apposite example here would be the planned practice in future US censuses, necessitated by an act of Congress (the 1996 Defence of Marriage Act, or DOMA), of recoding legally married same-sex couples in the State of Massachusetts as 'unmarried partners'. Yet it is also in the context of *ethos* that we recognise the political project of the *Atlas* (and most likely bureaucrats at the US Census Bureau who introduced the category 'unmarried partners' in the first place) as one of resisting (or breaking down) the closet.

Legg goes on to argue that these analytical levels are often appropriate at distinct *scales* of biopolitics at work in any given state knowledge system. In fact, he argues that control over the social construction of scale is central to the practices of governmentality, in that citizens learn to norm themselves as members of a polity that exists at a broader (e.g. national) scale. In this way they come to understand and discipline themselves and their bodies in relation to higher scales of belonging, the construction of which they have had very limited involvement in, and over which they have little if any direct control. The particular scales of biopolitics that Legg identifies are *subjectification*, *information collection and territorialisation*, *geopolitical imaginations*, *state technologies*, and *international comparisons*. Such a wide array of scales at which the *Atlas* works is beyond the scope of our paper. We do, however, take Legg's general point about how manipulating the spatial scale of governmentised representations of a population can reveal the constructedness of those representations' truth claims. Therefore, we focus more modestly on the multiple scales given *within* the state technology of Census data in our critique of the *Atlas*.

This point of focus is also inspired by recent work on the rubric scale in human geography (Delaney and Leitner, 1997; Sheppard and McMaster, 2004). This work has stressed various dimensions of the social construction of scale. Marston (2000), for example, drew a helpful analytical distinction between the scale of analysis and the scale of any empirical phenomena under scrutiny. Scale can have both cultural and political saliences that often go unrecognised or misunderstood in geographical work. Part of the power of social structures, like 'capitalism', for example (or of elites like 'capitalists'), may be exercised by manipulating or obfuscating the scales that are so often tacit in our conceptual or experiential relationship to them (Newstead *et al.*, 2003). This work may involve interrogating the range of scales, or the nature (fixed or fuzzy) of the boundaries between them (Marston, 2004). Smith (1992), for example, provocatively raised the possibility of 'scale-jumping' as a means of resisting capitalist hegemonies and neoliberal ideologies of globalisation (see also Swyngedouw, 2004). And Kurtz (2003) carefully traced the political geographies at work in the scale-framing and counter-framing of environmental justice movements.

From this literature we take the modest – but crucial – point that governmentality in Census data works in part through the already-given scalar hierarchies at which the data are collected. Representations based on such predetermined scale-framings, then, already privilege certain epistemes and technes over others. In terms of the census, certain technical designs and limitations reflect governmentality working through scale. For example, the smallest unit of analysis commonly available for reasonably robust use of data is the census tract. Often these have little if any relationship to locally meaningful places, such as neighbourhoods, although they are often used as surrogates since no better alternative exists. The *Atlas's* authors use postal zip codes as surrogates for neighbourhoods in certain cases, but the same problem remains (as does the problem of interpolating between census tracts and zip code areas, which are not coterminous). In other words, beyond simple numbers of same-sex couple households by census tract, the scale at which data are available limits meaningful discussions of both these households and the areas in which they are located.

With our critique of scale, we are also inspired by insights from critical cartography and GIS studies (Wood, 1992; Harley, 1996; Pickles, 2004; Schurman, 2004). These studies begin by reminding us about the power of visual epistemology in maps. The interpretation of maps (including population maps) as telling 'truths' is all too often encouraged by their authors and unquestioned by their readers, despite the fact they are models that are only ever partial in their representations, and distorted ones at that. That is, maps conceal crucial processes involved in the social construction of salient categories at the same time that they reveal and reify certain aspects of the populations being constructed. As such they frame the terms of the discourses about their subjects in enormously powerful ways. In the case of a queer population geography, the stakes for both governmental authorities and social activists are quite high. It is important to ask, therefore, what is the 'proper' scale at which concentrations ought to be mapped? Within which larger areal unit should basic units of analysis (such as census tracts) be situated? Indeed, is the census tract itself the obvious and appropriate unit of analysis?

Furthermore, the categories themselves only allow inferences about *same-sex couple households*, which are a small and not entirely valid subset of the gay and lesbian population, since not all gays and lesbians live in same-sex households and not all same-sex households are gay and lesbian. The result is a governmental closet for all but those gays and lesbians who identify in the census as members of same-sex households. In addition, the Census offers only certain pre-defined higher spatial scales that researchers and analysts may use. The most common are the City, the Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Area (CMSA), the county, the State, the Division, the Region, and then the country itself (the United States – Table 1). These are the governmentally-fixed Census scales in which one can readily situate census tracts. Other aggregations are possible, but only at the price of great investment of time, money and expertise. And as noted earlier, data at some scales not only are unavailable at others, but must by law be redefined depending upon scale.⁴

In light of these theoretical and practical problems, then, the question of the relationships between sexuality, scale and governmentality is

Table 1. Census geography.

Scale	Description
National	Contains all of the US including all 50 states, and the District of Columbia
Western Regional	A statistical aggregation of the Census that contains Washington, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Wyoming, California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Alaska and Hawaii
Pacific Division	A statistical aggregation of the Census that contains Washington, Oregon, California, Alaska and Hawaii
State	State of Washington, a legal jurisdiction containing 39 counties
CMSA	Consolidated metropolitan statistical area: census statistical unit that includes the cities of Seattle, Tacoma, Bremerton and Olympia. Spans Island, Snohomish, King, Kitsap, Pierce and Thurston counties
County	King County, Washington: a legal jurisdiction
City	City of Seattle: a legal jurisdiction
Tract	Census statistical aggregation

not trivial. In an attempt to provide some tentative empirical answers, we problematise the cultural saliency of the scales at which tracts ought to be situated and remap data for Seattle, Washington State, and certain of its environs. We chose this city for two reasons. Firstly, it scores quite high on the *Atlas's* overall ranking of 'gay' cities based on indices that the authors created. Secondly, we use our own familiarity with Seattle – what Clifford (1988) has called 'experiential authority' – to help triangulate the geographies offered by the *Atlas*, thereby drawing into relief the governmental power at work in the *Atlas's* own cartography as well as our own manipulations of the data on which it is based.

Arguing that both the County and the CMSA are more apposite than the City as larger areal units within which to situate census tracts, we

show previously closeted areas, and provide some interpretive context in suggesting why these areas might be worth knowing. Furthermore, we break out the data into gay (male–male) versus lesbian (female–female) households across the spatial scales. We find that there are important differences in rankings across the scales. Specifically we suggest that lesbian households are more sensitive to scale jumping than male or same-sex couple households overall in this sort of analysis.

Episteme, Techne and Individuals: The Algorithms of *The Gay and Lesbian Atlas*

Gates and Ost draw on Summary Tape Files 1 and 3 of the 2000 Census, which are publicly available (<http://www.census.gov>). They base their cartography not on simple percentages of same-sex households in given census tracts, but rather on what they call an 'index of concentration'. Basically equivalent to a location quotient (LQ), the authors wanted to capture and represent the different densities of same-sex households in census tracts. Location quotients were calculated and mapped separately for all same-sex households, male same-sex households, and female same-sex households, by census tract. The larger areal units used as denominators in the calculation of location quotients were either the City or State, depending upon the areal extent (or *scope* of the map.) That is, a map whose scope was that of a City showed location quotients whose numerators were based on the scale of the census tract and whose denominators were based on the scale of the City. Readers are instructed to interpret the index values as follows (p. 57):

'Since each index is a ratio of proportions, a value of 1.00 indicates that the proportions are the same. In this case, it means that a gay and/or lesbian couple is just as likely to be in that areal unit as any other household. Any value over 1.00 indicates that [same-sex] couples are more concentrated, or overrepresented, in that areal unit than the population in the area shown on the map. For example, an Index value of 2.00 for a tract means that same-sex couples are twice as likely as the typical households from the city to live in that location. Any value below 1.00 indicates that gay and/or lesbian couples are less concentrated in

that areal unit than the population in the area shown.'

For purposes (allegedly) of easy interpretability, the indices are classified into four classes. These are then choropleth mapped at the city or state scales, using GIS technologies. Tracts that receive a concentration-index score of 1.00 or below are deemed 'low concentration' and are coloured dark green. The range of index scores over 1.00 are then divided into three equal-interval ranks: moderate (yellow), high (orange) and 'very high' (red). Combining maps based on calculations for each of the 50 states, as well as a selection of cities, the *Atlas* yields a powerful, colourful cartography that visually emphasises areas that have very high or very low concentrations.⁵ Our replication of their result is given in Fig. 1.⁶ The general spatial pattern is unsurprising. Tracts on Capitol Hill (widely recognised locally as 'home' to Seattle's large gay and lesbian community) clearly have the highest concentrations of same-sex couples.

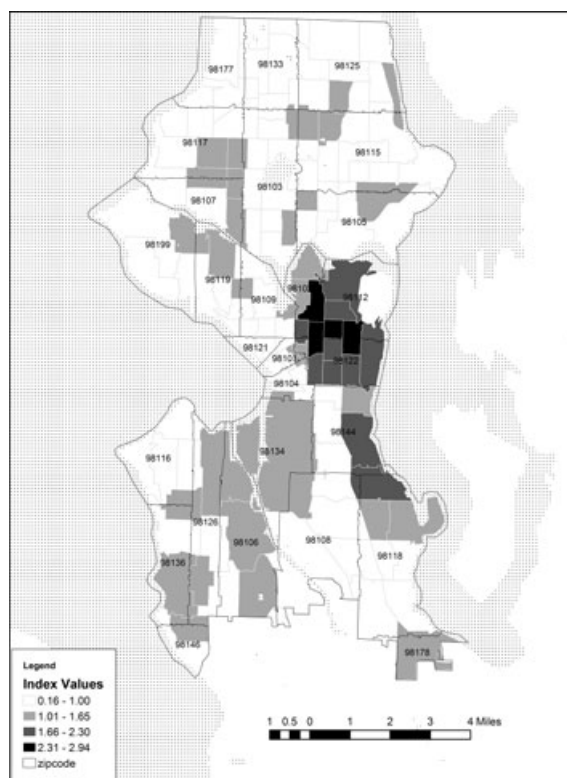


Figure 1. Concentrations of same-sex households, city scope: location quotients situated at city scale.

However, the question of the 'proper' or 'appropriate' scales at which to calculate, represent and frame same-sex households raises long-standing issues from quantitative geography. Spatial science has long been aware of the so-called 'Modifiable Area Unit Problem', for instance, in which different cartographic patterns or results are contingent upon the scale-framing of the spatial units used in the analysis (Openshaw, 1983). Furthermore, spatial science has persistently been aware of the endemic nature of this problem in the calculation of location quotients, where changing the base/denominator (or what we call *situation*) of the statistic changes the results, often quite substantially (Taeuber and Taeuber, 1965; Shaw and Wheeler, 1994). Isard's (1960: 124) classic text on regional science warned that location quotients are extremely contingent on the assumptions of the researcher, and are perhaps best used at an exploratory, early phase of research. Most importantly, he recognised the inherent modifiable area unit problem endemic to the statistic, by noting that, 'In computing the location quotient . . . an investigator can use any base he [sic] considers significant for the problem and region under study.' He thus advised that the choice of the base (what we call *situation*) should be guided by the nature of the study and research questions. Critical literatures on the social construction of scale now raise the saliency of these problems beyond merely technical realms to social, political, ontological and epistemological ones (see below).

To be sure, Gates and Ost (pp. 54–5) are by no means ignorant of the scale-dependent nature of their cartography. They caution readers explicitly about the relative nature of the concentrations that they map. Such cautions, however, are of a technical, rather than ontological nature. Implicit in their decision is an uncritical privileging of consistency and comparability over particularity and contingency, or, more epistemologically-speaking, of the nomothetic over the idiographic. This is because of their commitment to using the atlas's cartography to engage with governmental and other 'authorities' on their own terms (Gates and Ost, 2004: 2–6). If the ethos of the project is to dismantle the closet, it is logical to question why the municipality and the state are the best or only scales at which to frame the open closet door. What happens, for example, if we jump-scale, or re-frame scale?

REDRAWING THE MAP: CLOSET SPACE/CLOSET SCALES?

As a first step in our own analysis, then, we relaxed Gates and Ost's assumption that the most appropriate standard against which to measure same-sex household concentrations on a map is that which corresponds to the map's areal extent (or *scope*). That is, we calculated location quotients (LQs) using a variety of different denominator-scales, rather than just that which corresponds to the maps' scopes. In particular, we re-mapped concentrations by census tract in the city of Seattle using LQs based on City, County, CMSA, State, Pacific Region, Western Region, and national 'norms' (*situation*), rather than just the ones corresponding to the *scope* of the map (the City). These are the pre-determined geographical scales into which the Census data are aggregated (see Table 1). We did this because we wanted to challenge what we see as a highly governmentalised convention to which *The Gay and Lesbian Atlas's* authors' felt compelled to adhere: 'The decision to display the relative concentration of gay and lesbian couples means the reader can quickly assess where gay and lesbian couples constitute the highest proportion of households within the region shown on the map' (p. 54). In other words, Gates and Ost feel that in order to be most 'meaningful' (although it would seem here more from the perspective of a trained map reader than a member of the population whose concentrations are being mapped), an LQ's denominator (what we call a map's *situation*) should be consistent with the map's *scope* – e.g. a map of same-sex household concentrations in the City of Seattle should use an LQ denominator that is calculated at the city scale.

From our perspective, however, this assumption-laden choice is not self-evident at all, in part because such a correspondence is neither necessarily *culturally* meaningful nor politically innocent. The polygons involved are *not* always socially meaningful *places*, and people's lives take place at multiple scales anyway (see Cresswell, 2004, for an excellent elaboration on this point). For people who live in Seattle, for instance, it might very well make more sense to situate LQs in terms of the County in which Seattle is located or the Seattle CMSA, rather than just the City (see below). This is because the lived experience of many Seattle residents (potentially quite differ-

ent from the more circumscribed experience of the map reader) does not stop at the city limits! Indeed, there is quite a bit of empirical evidence documenting how suburban and proximate rural and exurban queer folk also see themselves as part of 'gay Seattle', which itself has a long history of queer-friendly policies and state-apparatuses, especially in contrast to the state and federal governments (see Atkins, 2003; Northwest Lesbian and Gay History Museum Project, 2003).

Situating LQs for Seattle tracts at the City level, then, has the potential, as we demonstrate below, to closet certain populations who live in areas that only stand out in more non-traditionally situated maps. This unintended consequence is logically inconsistent with the project of the Atlas itself, which was to *uncloset* gay and lesbian people in the Census. For all the above reasons, we produced maps of LQs for King County and the Seattle CMSA, rather than just the City, using a variety of LQ denominator-scales (*situations*) and disaggregating by gender, as well as showing combined results. We produced 63 maps in total (more than can be shown here). Certain of the more illustrative ones are displayed in Figures 1–11.

Following Gates and Ost's protocol, the ordinal classification scheme was based on dividing LQs into four categories: values less than or equal to 1.0 (the 'norm' for the particular map's situation) constituted the first interval (green), while the range of values between 1.0 and the maximum was divided into three equal intervals (yellow, orange and red).⁷ In looking at the resulting patterns, some findings were anticipated and others were surprising. For instance, all of the maps confirmed suggestions from the existing literature that while both gay male and lesbian populations tend to be concentrated in cities and overlap somewhat, lesbian populations are less concentrated than gay male ones and are by no means coterminous with them (Adler and Brenner, 1992; Grebinoski, 1993; Bouthillette, 1997; Forsyth, 1997; Knopp, 1998; Valentine, 2000 – see Figures 2 and 3). Nor was it surprising, due to the generally high levels of concentration for both populations, that the patterns on more locally situated maps – regardless of their scope – showed more variable patterns than those situated at broader scales. Interestingly, however, when the data were disaggregated by gender,

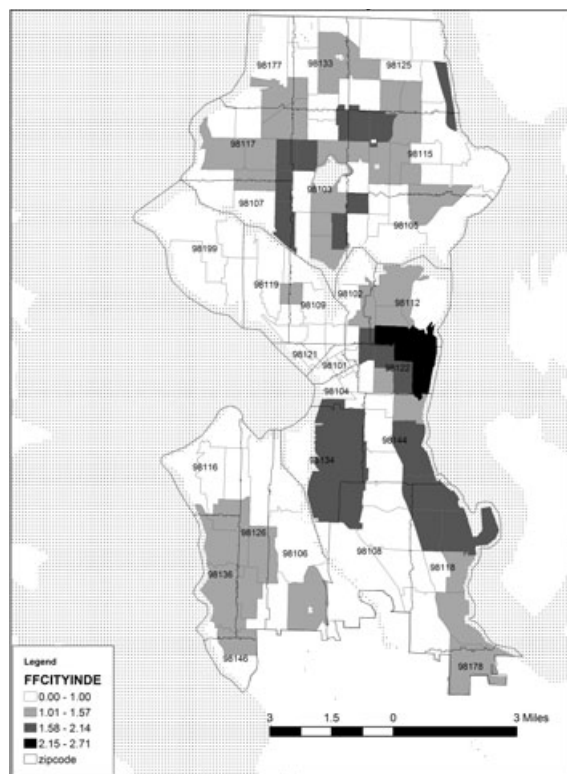


Figure 2. Concentrations of female same-sex households, city scope: location quotients situated at city scale.

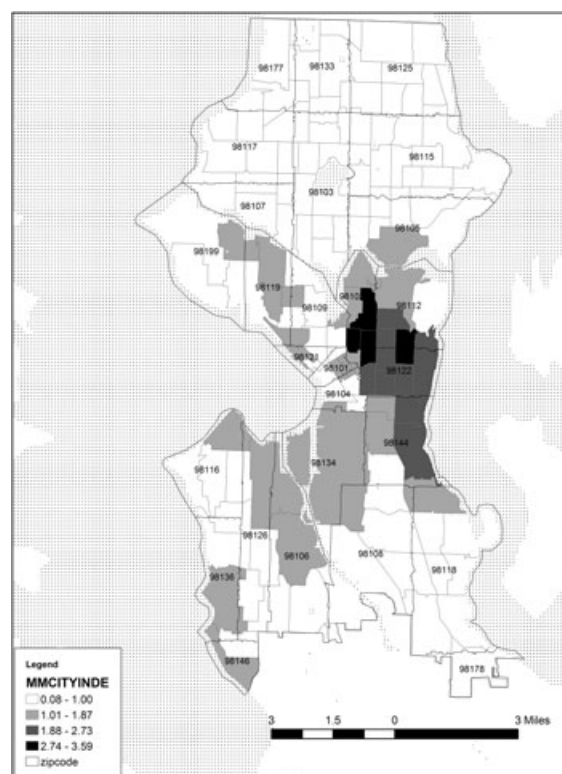


Figure 3. Concentrations of male same-sex households, city scope: location quotients situated at city scale.

this finding held true for the male–male household concentrations only.⁸ This is most readily ‘seen’ in a City map of female couple household concentrations situated at the Western Regional scale (the largest subnational scale the census offers), where concentrations in south, southeast, and parts of north Seattle become particularly visible (Fig. 4). All of these are areas that are ‘known’ locally to be homes to substantial numbers of lesbians, yet they only show up clearly on maps situated in a way that defies statistical and cartographic conventions. Similarly, on maps whose scopes are King County and the Seattle CMSA, we can best ‘see’ evidence of female same-sex households in southeast Seattle (but, interestingly, not as much in north Seattle) on maps situated at the State scale and above. We also see evidence of female same-sex household concentrations in certain areas outside the City of Seattle, such as Vashon and Maury Islands in Puget Sound (both of which are known locally as ‘lesbian-friendly’ – see Figs 5 and 6), and which are quite rural, despite their spatial situation

between the two urban centres of Seattle and Tacoma.

We speculate that this gender difference is due to a combination of the territorial compositions of the various areal units comprising the maps’ situations, and differences in the lived experiences of gay male and lesbian couples. The census’s ‘Western Region’, for example, includes a lot of mostly rural territory in the intermountain west, while the Pacific region (the next lower scale) is more coastal and metropolitan (again see Table 1). Hence we would expect gay and lesbian couples both to be a bit more visible in maps situated at the Western Region level than other more densely populated and metropolitan ones, including the national. In fact, this is true only for the lesbian couple households, which do indeed become less visible when maps are situated at the national scale.⁹ For gay male couples, visibility is virtually unchanged when this shift is made (see Figs 7–9).

This difference between lesbian and gay male households’ visibility, depending on maps’ situ-

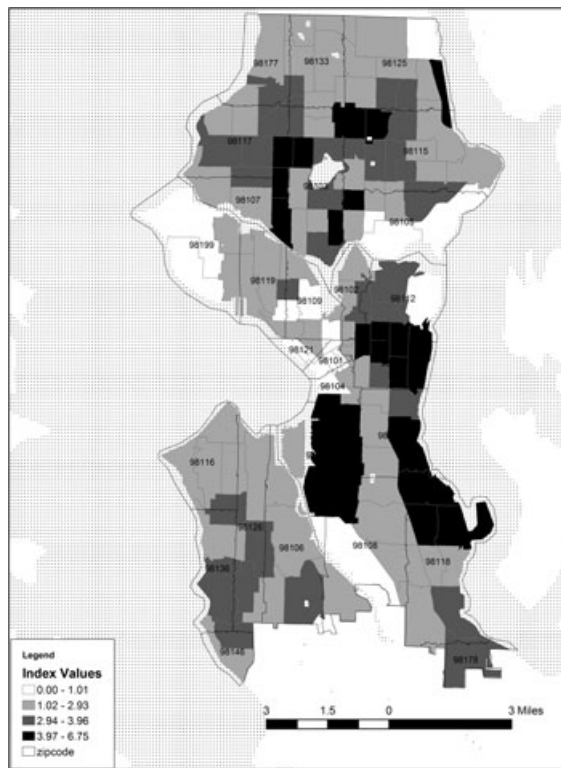


Figure 4. Concentration of female same-sex households, city scope: location quotients situated at Western Regional scale.

ations (and to some degree their scopes), probably speaks to some difference in the lived spatial experiences of the gay male and lesbian couples that are counted in the census. We have already cited several studies of gay male and lesbian residential location patterns that suggest that lesbian residences are somewhat less spatially concentrated at the urban scale than gay male ones, and indeed female couples in the census data are a bit less concentrated in the city of Seattle than male couples (only 45% of the counted same-sex households in Seattle were female, while at all other scales the proportions tend to be much closer). This makes sense given what the literature suggests regarding *reasons* for lesbian populations being less concentrated than gay male ones, namely that the combination of housing affordability patterns and gender-based wage rate differences (among other forces) lead to more lesbians than gay men living beyond expensive urban core areas (Adler and Brenner, 1992; Peake, 1993). In Seattle, parts of north-

central, south and southeast Seattle are much more affordable than most of the tracts that rank highest on the male same-sex indices.

But even if the explanation for this difference is purely statistical (and we doubt that possibility), it appears that the maps' situations closet (and uncloset) lesbian and gay male couples differently. If the objective of queer demography generally, and *The Gay and Lesbian Atlas* specifically, is to 'see' gays and lesbians in the data, areal units that are primarily administrative, and whose cultural meanings are vague at best (e.g. the Census's 'Western Region'), are, interestingly, 'best' for 'seeing' lesbians (especially in maps of the City of Seattle), while gay male couples are most easily 'seen' – and fairly consistently so – in maps situated at scales broader than the county.

This finding suggests that the 'appropriateness' of the scales at which LQs are situated really depends on the nature of the represented populations' lived experiences (and, of course, the purpose to which the maps are going to be put). Here, the lived experiences of lesbian and gay male couples are arguably different – certainly a point of considerable agreement across the literature (Jagose, 1996; Nestle and Preston, 1995; Sullivan, 2003). The cultural meaning of maps showing their relative concentrations in larger populations, then, are also different. For gay male couples, the lived experience of spatial concentration is 'best' represented (if by 'best' we mean the most deeply coloured census tracts) on maps situated at the County scale or above. For lesbian couples, the somewhat less concentrated lived experience is 'best' represented on maps situated at much broader scales.

In terms of governmentality, this difference is very significant. Governmental authorities as well as political activists frequently invoke statistics to lend credibility and authority to their policy decisions and rhetorical claims. This is what Legg refers to explicitly when he discusses *techné*. *Stable* statistics are often particularly valued, as they can be cited (often wrongly, and because of their stability) as evidence of 'truth'. Studies of gay men and lesbians, for instance, fairly consistently cite statistics purporting to show that gay men are more numerous, affluent, and politically influential than lesbians (Black *et al.*, 2000; Brown *et al.*, 2005; Gates and Ost, 2004; but see Badgett, 1995; Bennett and Gates, 2004).

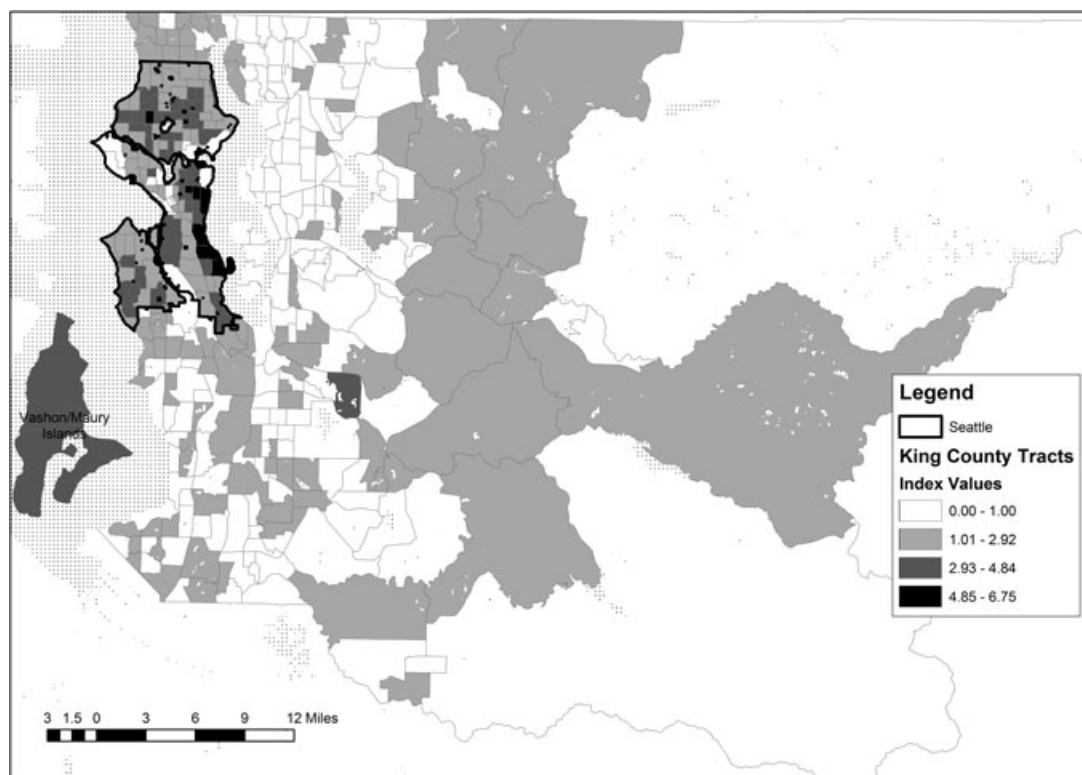


Figure 5. Concentrations of female same-sex households, county scope: location quotients situated at Western Regional scale.

While some of these claims may be true, our results here suggest that perhaps gay men (*coupled* gay men sharing households, to be exact) are just easier to find and count, especially given statistical and cartographic conventions that privilege symmetry and functionality (in this case, a correspondence between the scope of a map and its situation) over cultural meaning. In other words, governmentality works through the Census, its pre-given scalar structure and polygons, *and* through scientific conventions (designed in part to facilitate the use of data generated by the census) to closet lesbians. It is then adopted and incorporated by members of the represented population as a static truth about the geographies of their communities, as witnessed by various news stories about the (un)surprising concentrations of gays and lesbians in locales such as San Francisco (Marech, 2004), but also Salt Lake City, Utah (Reed, 2005), Albuquerque, New Mexico (Andersen, 2004), Iowa City, Iowa (Associated Press, 2004b), and South Dakota (Associated Press, 2004a). Through our interven-

tions here we have shown how manipulations of the data that work against these conventions (to the extent that this is possible) can produce results that are more (or less!) meaningful from the perspective of understanding the actual lived experience of lesbians as well as gay men (i.e. to throw open the closet door).

Another point to bear in mind about our maps is the obvious one that, because the same-sex couples captured in census counts are so concentrated in the city of Seattle, the patterns are often more visually striking and discernable when the scope of the map is something larger than the city – e.g. the county or the CMSA. While this point may seem banal, it is not, because visually it is driven home much more powerfully if one actually ‘sees’ this disparity represented in maps of larger areas than the units in which most of the same sex couples are found. Furthermore, despite generally high levels of same-sex household concentrations in Seattle, maps of broader scope enable us to ‘see’ patterns that might otherwise go unnoticed. The two census tracts

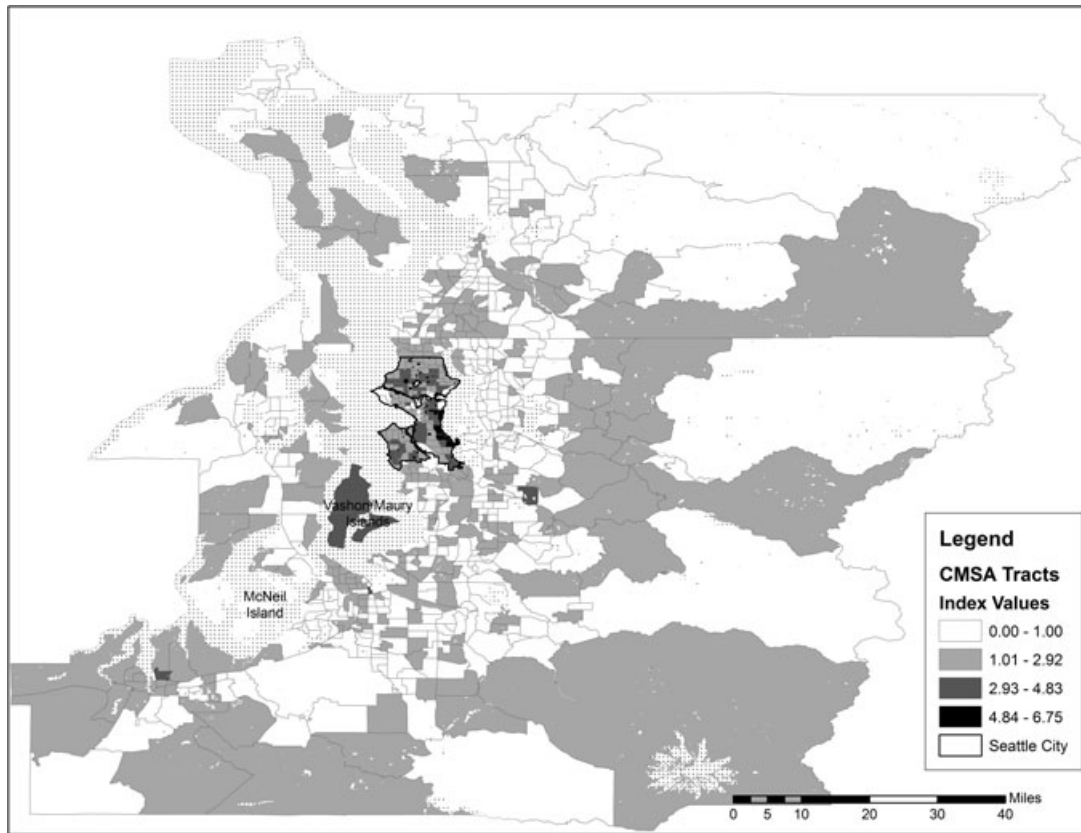


Figure 6. Concentrations of female same-sex households, CMSA scope: location quotients situated at Western Regional scale.

comprising Vashon and Maury Islands (just southwest of Seattle in Puget Sound), for example, show up quite consistently on County and CMSA maps as having relatively heavy concentrations of female same-sex households. This agrees with local knowledge of these islands in the Seattle area. Similarly, McNeil Island, the site of a State correctional facility and special commitment centre in southern Puget Sound, stood out vividly in our initial CMSA maps as having a particularly heavy concentration of same-sex households – so much so that we ended up excluding it from our calculations of intervals for colour-coding the maps, since including it ended up ‘closeting’ same-sex couples elsewhere in the CMSA (cf. Figures 10 and 11; and see Note 1). This point, about governmentality through what Legg calls *visibility*, affirms the longstanding point about the power of visualisation and its manipulation in GIS and cartography overall: namely, that we must pay careful attention to the processes that simultaneously

enable and conceal what we visualise through cartography, and that these processes often do important political, cultural and economic work. We would reiterate here, though, that as evidenced in our critique above, this point is all the more salient in the context of queer geography, where the political issue of visibility/invisibility is at the core of oppression and resistance (Sedgwick, 1990).

So, there is the issue of the ontological consequences of representing LQs with denominators that are of different scales (maps’ *situations*), the ontological significance of the areal extent of maps (their *scope*), and the ontological consequences of representing male and female couples separately versus together. The different results illustrate the intractable nature of the question ‘what is gay’, as well as the elusive and contingent nature of the closet’s own spatiality. Sadly, *The Gay and Lesbian Atlas*’s authors do not appear to think very deeply about any of these questions, especially that of maps’ situations. Instead,

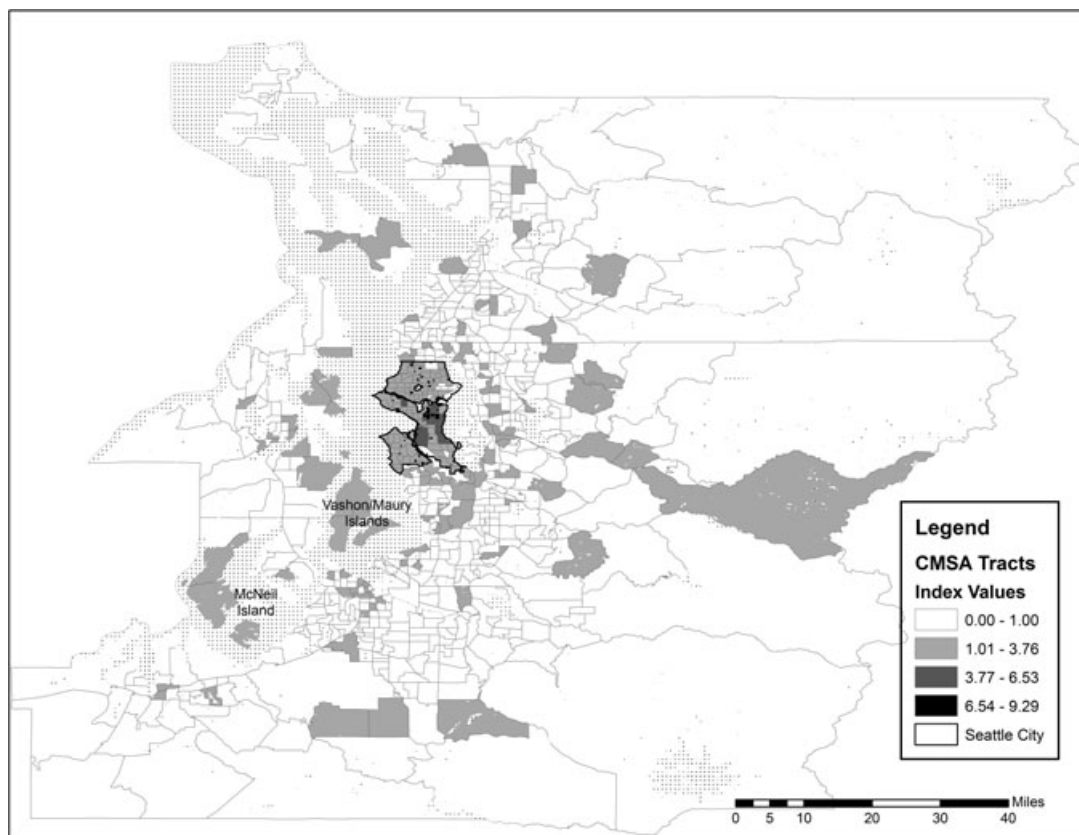


Figure 7. Concentrations of male same-sex households, CMSA scope: location quotients situated at the CMSA scale.

they opt for a particularly instrumental – and, we would submit, surreptitiously governmentalised – approach in which Census data and maps derive their greatest value from their deployment in the service of policy development. This grand assumption is evidenced in the way that they further develop their justification. They suggest that maps of states, for instance, may be more ‘interesting’ than those of the ‘nation’, due to ‘the current era of federal to state fiscal and program devolution’ (p. 56). Suggesting this possibility is a clear example of governmentality’s reach into the formation of political subjects even on the part of people attempting to resist such constructions. Gates and Ost clearly seem constrained by the expediencies and consistencies of fixing and reifying scale.

Another interesting result of our manipulations is that some census tracts never change their ordinal ranking (or colour) regardless of the scale within which the data are situated or the maps’ scopes (after eliminating – and thus *reclus-*

eting – clear outliers such as the correctional facility at McNeil Island). No matter the maps’ situations or scopes, certain tracts in the Seattle core remain ‘very high’ in terms of the concentration index (especially for male couples), and certain others outside Seattle remain ‘very low’. This stability suggests that, in some places, varying scale may *not* matter. We speculate that this again reflects something about the lived experience on the ground for gay and lesbian couples and perhaps others as well. While it is tempting to explain these cases simply as outliers, or evidence of high levels of segregation among same-sex unmarried partners and other households, the subtleties and nuances of our other results suggest that their precise meanings can probably only be ascertained using more qualitative methods – and may in fact vary depending upon the perspective taken and the reasons for asking the question in the first place.

Put differently, this stability in rankings for some census tracts speaks to the reification of

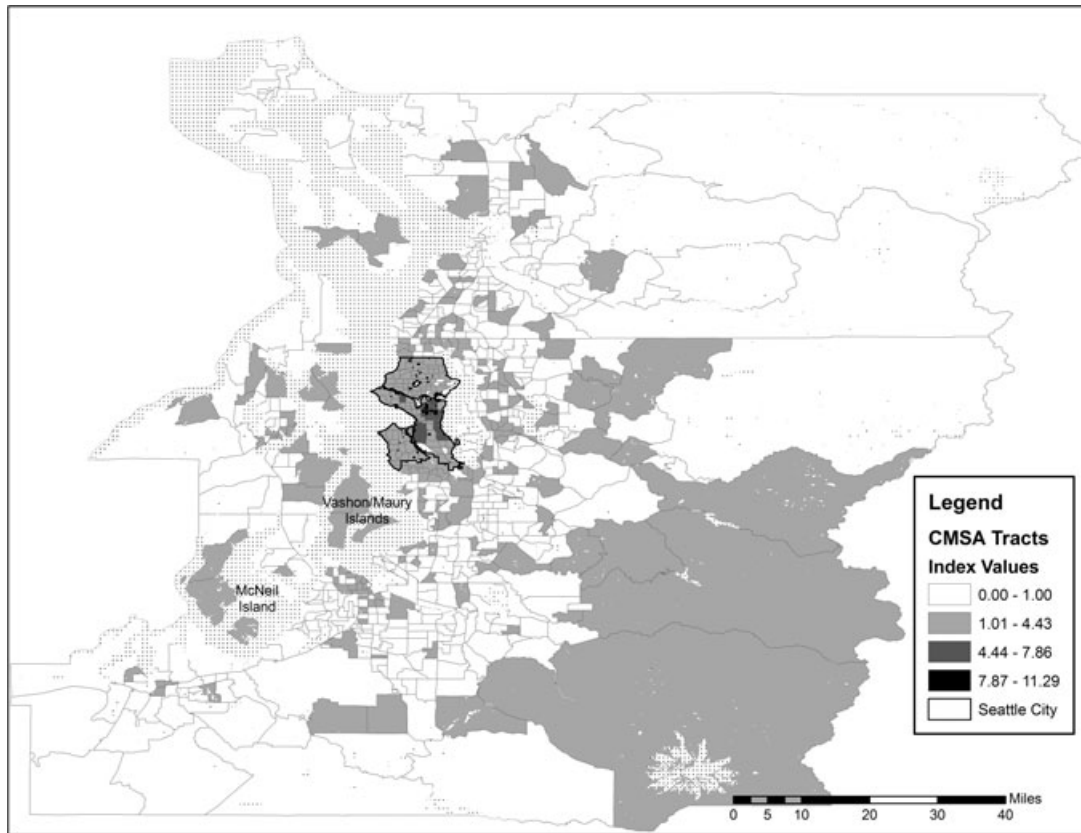


Figure 8. Concentrations of male same-sex households, CMA scope: location quotients situated at the State scale.

ordinal classifications into politically and culturally meaningful ontologies, thus impinging not just upon Legg's notion of *visibility* but that of political subjects' *identities* as well. To see consistency across denominator scales in terms of colour, contiguous patterns, clusters, and so on, tempts readers of the maps to invest the representations with a certain amount of power or authority or validity. This is part and parcel of governmentality, and as the 'flip side' of our and *The Gay and Lesbian Atlas's* 'uncloseting' project, it is a matter of grave concern to us as critical geographers. So, for example, the series of maps we have produced may say to a gay person 'Matthews Beach [an area on Lake Washington in northeast Seattle] is not for me, but Capitol Hill [an area in central Seattle] is'. A worrisome governmentalised inference that readers of this paper might draw from our juxtaposed maps, then, is that tracts like Matthews Beach are intensely, or unquestionably, heterosexual, while Capitol Hill is intensely gay. And yet we know of

gay couples who live in Matthews Beach, and straight households on Capitol Hill.

Now, we recognise, like the authors of *The Gay and Lesbian Atlas*, that we are still working within many of the constraints imposed by scientific conventions and the Census, and hence visually-epistemologically limiting what is representable, based on data structures and the theory and practices that governmental authorities have used to produce them. There is an infinite universe of alternative LQ denominators – and numerators, for that matter – that theoretically could have been used (assuming unlimited resources to define new polygons and generate data accordingly). Various of these would almost certainly produce different patterns, some of which would be unanticipated and stimulate still more insights, or closet and uncloset in interesting ways. This matters epistemologically because we often do not realise the quotidian ways that we use spatial categories that are already governmentalised, such as the census tract, the city, the

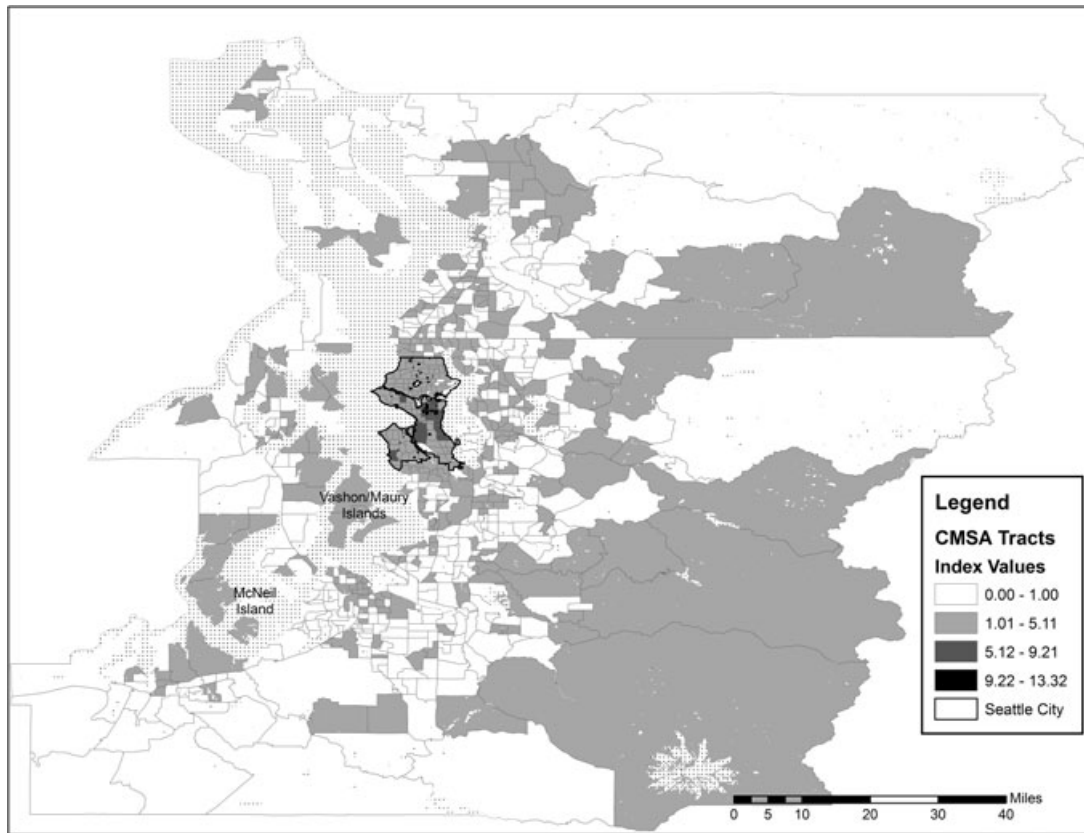


Figure 9. Concentrations of male same-sex households, CMSA scope: location quotients situated at the National scale.

county, the state or the nation, when our lived geographies do not necessarily conform to these mentalities of government. This is 'biopower' in a quite concrete form, and it reminds us of the ubiquitous, insidious power of governmentality generally. In this critique, therefore, we are mindful of the fact that while we chip away at this form of governmentality, we by no means escape it.

Still, by deliberately manipulating the scales and scopes of the geographies we produce, we see ourselves as simultaneously attacking the closet and illustrating its fluidity. Thus yet another point to take from this research is that while the closet is still material, it is also multi-dimensional – even within a particular ontological framing of it. Moreover its fluidity is, in this case, very much about scale. This empirically affirms recent arguments generally in critical geography over the significance of scale-jumping and also scale-framing in resistance projects generally. More specifically, it affirms theoretical

attempts in recent queer geography that attempt to 'ground' the closet without fixing it or losing a sense of its hybridity and fluidity.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to respond to recent calls around the potential for Foucault's notion of governmentality to advance knowledge and debate within and between population and critical geographies. Empirically, we achieved this aim through a critique of the geographies presented in *The Gay and Lesbian Atlas*. Extending recent work in population geography on governmentality, we suggested that the technical decisions involved in calculating and representing same-sex households to the American public in popular form evince particular forms of governmentality, especially around the question of spatial scale. Since the *Atlas* relies on pre-given data structures and spatial scalings, and the calculation of location quotients (LQs) whose bases

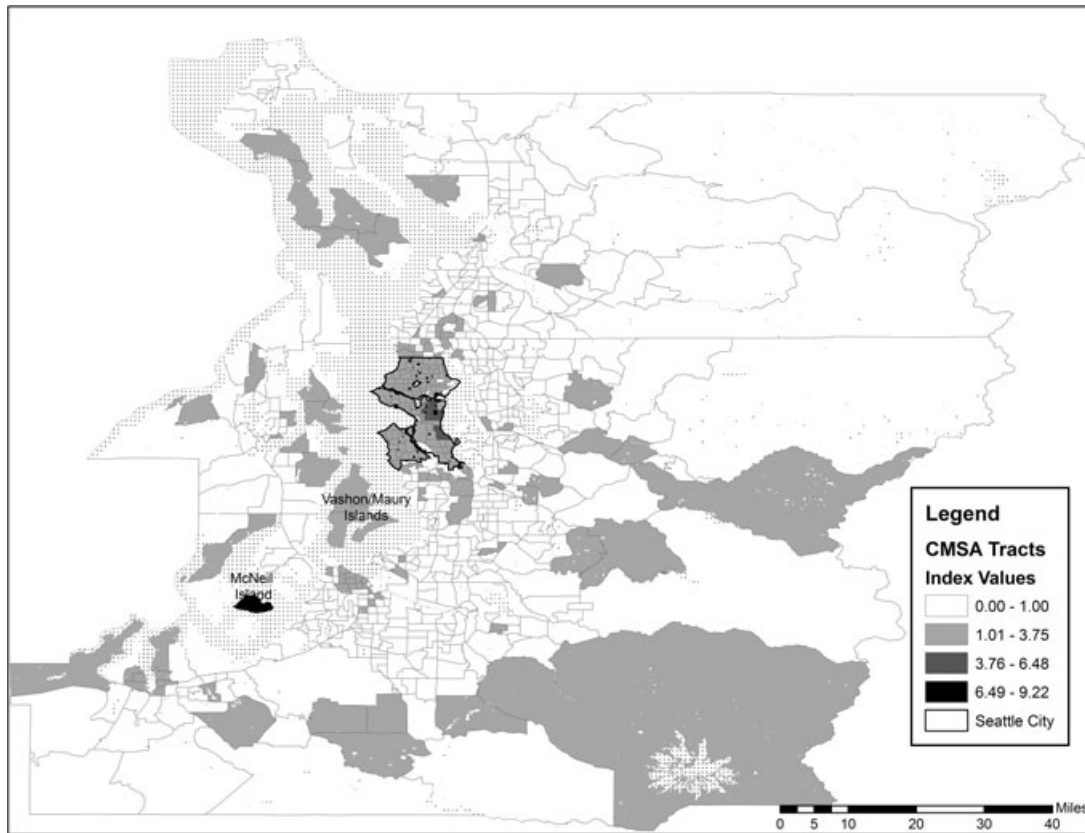


Figure 10. Concentrations of same-sex households (McNeil Island included), CMSA scope: location quotients situated at the CMSA scale.

are uncritically fixed at either the municipal or state scale, varying these bases (what we call maps' *situations*), as well as maps' scopes, shows how closets around same-sex households are necessarily and simultaneously reproduced *and* broken down in such a scale-dependent enterprise. Furthermore, these seemingly technical decisions are not innocent in terms of *which* closets are reproduced and which are broken down. Hence they are anything but *merely* technical. On the contrary, the entire *episteme* (to use Legg's term) involved in the enterprise has potentially very powerful consequences for the production of visible political subjects (in this case a gay and lesbian population), and hence to the processes and practices constituting governmentality.

While technically both the *Atlas*'s and our maps are simply of polygons with different index values, these polygons, their colours, and their spatial situations are meant to approximate

something more meaningful in the lives and experiences of human beings (including not just the populations under consideration but potential map readers as well). That is, the polygons are meant to represent *places*, the index values something meaningful about the populations of those places, and the resulting knowledge something 'useful' to audiences as diverse as government authorities, gay activists, and (potentially) even anti-gay activists. Crucial so-called 'technical' decisions therefore make a huge difference in terms of both the knowledge produced and its potential uses.

The *identities* produced in *The Gay and Lesbian Atlas* are governmentalised in the obvious sense that cohabiting same-sex couples are the only same-sex-oriented people recognised. While nothing in the Census claims that these couples are necessarily gay or lesbian, the vast majority of Census users – including the *Atlas*'s authors, Census Bureau demographers, and ourselves –

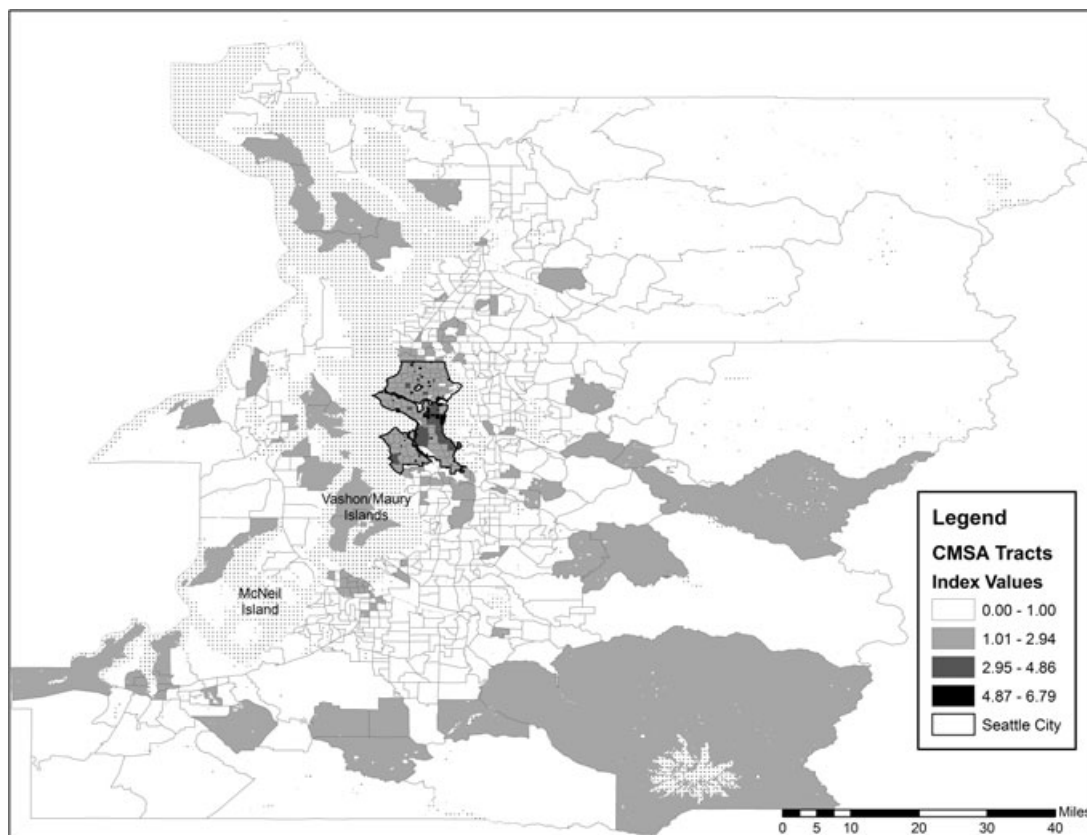


Figure 11. Concentrations of same-sex households (McNeil Island excluded), CMSA scope: location quotients situated at the CMSA scale.

operate on the assumption that they are. Hence those cohabiting same-sex couples who do not so identify are, for all practical purposes, deemed not to exist. Varying the scopes of maps as well as their situations, in concert with decisions about colour schemes and the range of index value intervals, also impinges on the production of identities by manipulating *visibility*. Such 'technical' decisions necessarily highlight some polygons at the expense of others (witness our decision to 'closet' the same-sex couples on McNeil Island in order to make more visible those in central Seattle). In other words, the uncloseting of some populations necessarily comes at the expense of the closeting of others (and vice versa). Disaggregating results by gender only intensifies this paradox. Hence the analytics of *identities* and *visibility* are intimately related, in that particular governmentalised notions of identity are necessarily predicated upon some form of visibility. Those tracts, for

example, that score 'low' on our and the *Atlas's* indices are all-too-often reified as being 'non-gay', even if some same-sex couples are present. The consequences in terms of governmentality are obvious: gay people in 'non-gay' areas are all too easily seen as not existing at all, and may suffer (or benefit) in public policy terms as a result.

Our manipulations probably speak most directly, though, to the analytic of *techné* that Legg identifies. Recall that *techné* refers to techniques and technologies of framing, including what Legg calls 'the politics of numbers'. We contend that the decision by the *Atlas's* authors to accept uncritically the various data structures and spatial scalings of the US Census, as well as the protocols and conventions of quantitative social science, speaks volumes about the ways in which governmentality insinuates itself into the everyday practices of citizen-subjects, including even supposedly critically-thinking academics.

To be clear, we do not fault Gates and Ost for doing what they did. Indeed, our own manipulations are as much trapped in many of these constraints as theirs. However, we do fault them for not thinking critically *enough* about their decisions, and for not recognising the profound epistemological, ontological, and political implications of such decisions. Thinking theoretically and against conventions allowed us to rework the data in such a way as to represent at least somewhat the fluidity and multidimensionality of the closet, despite the many limitations of the Census, of quantitative social science, and of mapping techniques and technologies.

Our analysis also speaks to the important place of governmentality in the so-called 'culture wars'. In identifying and rendering same-sex couples more or less visible, manipulations such as ours (and the *Atlas's*) provide fodder to partisans on all sides who seek to shape the *ethos* of governmentality. They do so by, among other things, visually and statistically signifying norms and deviance.¹⁰ For instance, in both the *Atlas's* and our own mappings, LQ values at or below 1.0 are treated as a single, coherent category, while values above 1.0 are divided into three supposedly meaningful ranked groups. Thus deviations in a negative direction (i.e. in the direction of fewer same-sex couples) are visually and statistically indistinguishable from 'average' concentrations (or those that might be construed as 'normal'). Areas with minimal or no same-sex couples are simply not marked as deviant, whereas areas that deviate significantly from the 'norm' in a positive direction – even just a little – are. Thus governmentality insinuates itself into the *Atlas's* (and our) renderings in all kinds of ways that have myriad potential consequences in terms of *ethos*, many of them very likely unintended by the *Atlas's* authors (and certainly by ourselves). The leap from statistical deviation to social deviance is not a large one when it is represented visually in such a powerful way. It can manifest itself in a sense of isolation and/or separatism on the part of those in the spaces and categories marked as deviating from the norm, by facilitating supremacist and/or subordinate imaginations on the parts of both the dominant and the subordinate (including, potentially, visions of segregation and containment), and by reinforcing stereotypes spatially. Imagine how differently the maps might be read if extreme

negative deviations from 1.0 (as well as positive ones) were clearly visible, and areas with values coalescing around 1.0 combined into a single category. This recalibration of categories would not eliminate the issue of visually reinforcing a norm, but would at least have the potential to construct areas with very few same-sex couple households as being just as deviant as those with relatively large proportions. It is all the more crucial, therefore, that those engaged in mapping queer space be cognisant of the hidden assumptions, values and possibilities inherent in them.

Finally, we hope that our analysis not only brings a more critical sensibility to population geography, but an appreciation in critical geography of the ways in which quantitative methods and mapping practices can, if used carefully, be used to illustrate fluid, multidimensional, and other seemingly elusive aspects of the world. The closet, for example, would seem to be one of the more difficult and abstract phenomena to quantify and visually represent. Yet by juxtaposing multiple maps, and representing multiple scalings of data in fairly subtle ways, we think we have captured visually at least some of the complications and nuances of the closet. Triangulating these results with our own more qualitative knowledge (and that of others) has the potential to take research such as this even further.

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NOTES

- (1) A sign for heteronormativity and homophobia, the closet works by denying presence, by saying 'you're not here', and by the self-disciplining of sexual dissidents who go along with such closeting. For fuller discussions, see Sedgwick (1990) and Fuss (1991).
- (2) This is not a trivial observation. According to the *Atlas*, some of the highest concentration census tracts in US States such as Minnesota and

- Montana are on Indian reservations. The *Atlas's* authors do not remark on this, but it seems likely that this pattern has more to do with differences in the ways that Native and non-Native-American cultures conceive, structure and arrange relationships generally, rather than with the dominant-culture-defined categories of 'gay' and 'lesbian' (Jacobs *et al.*, 1997).
- (3) It is worth noting as well that the more general issue of sexuality has been a dimension of governmental knowledge and practice that Philo (2005) argues population geographers are well-poised to research.
 - (4) Whereas most data suppression takes place at the local scale, ostensibly to protect confidentiality, in the case of the US federal government's planned recoding of data regarding same-sex married couples in Massachusetts, the suppression occurs *at all scales* by federal edict. This illustrates the power of thinking about the closet spatially, and in particular as a scale-dependent phenomenon.
 - (5) The juxtaposition of the cool colour green (evincing quotient values ≤ 1.0) with warmer colours for those values > 1 uses the basics of colour theory to viscerally and boldly illustrate the patterns. See Parramon (1988) for a discussion.
 - (6) Our result is not precisely equivalent to Gates and Ost's for two reasons: firstly, they apparently used data from two files, and the data-cleansing processes they used to reconcile these are not detailed in the *Atlas*. We used only data from Summary Tape File (STF) 1, which is the 100% sample of households. Secondly, while we originally replicated Gates and Ost's colour scheme, for publication purposes we were forced (by technical production constraints) to switch to grey-scales. The consequences of this change in terms of governmentality are no doubt significant, but beyond the purview of this paper.
 - (7) Unlike Gates and Ost, we list the range of location quotients next to the class intervals on the maps for greater precision and more meaningful comparability across scales. Obviously the LQ values are not reliable across the differently-scaled and situated versions (in part because the intervals for each map's legend are necessarily different, given the way that LQ values are calculated). This protocol, too, may be an instance of governmentality!
 - (8) An important caveat here is that in the CMSA-scope maps a census tract comprising McNeil Island in southern Puget Sound appears as a high-value outlier for male same-sex households. McNeil Island is a former federal penitentiary and current site of a State correctional facility and a State special commitment centre for sexual offenders. There are 26 total households on the island, all of which are provided by the State of Washington for workers associated with the two facilities. Two of these households show up in the census as male same-sex unmarried partner households. Because of its outlier status and the closeting consequences, for other areas, of including it in the CMSA-scope maps, we excluded this census tract value from the calculation of LQ intervals on the combined and same-sex household CMSA maps.
 - (9) In fact, this subtle change in visibility as maps' situations shift from Western Regional to National is visible only on the City of Seattle maps. The general pattern of increased lesbian visibility on maps situated at broader scales, though, holds true across map scopes.
 - (10) Thanks to Tim Bushnell for his very insightful comments on this point (detailed below).

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