

SCHOOL OF GEOGRAPHY COURSEWORK SUBMISSION

COVERSHEET 17/18

Please complete the following table in full

Student number (9 digits):		
Module code and title:	GEG7120 - GEOGRAPHICAL THOUGHT AND PRACTICE	
Submission deadline date:	27 March 2019	
Coursework title:	Living Alone in the Linear Village: Mononormativity and the City	
Total number of words:	2488	
I declare that this coursework is entirely my own work and contains no instances of plagiarism	<input type="checkbox"/>	Put 'x' in box (left) to confirm

Living Alone in the Linear Village¹:

Mononormativity and the City

Introduction

The perception of what is accepted as a legal partnership has widened from the unit of marriage to include coupledness marked by cohabitation. This has seen the demographic understanding of interpersonal relations in the UK dictated by household configuration (Roseniel, 2006). This, coupled with UK family policies with 'narratives claiming that stable coupled relationships are the foundation of a strong nation' (Wilkinson, 2013), sees the reproduction of moral values that have the potential to discriminate against those who live alone. Scholars and journalists have described those who live alone as examples of a fragmented society (Bauman, 2003; Jacques, 2004), even going as far as measuring 'loneliness' and 'social fragmentation' in Britain by calculating the numbers of non-married adults and one-person households (Dorling et al, 2008). Those who live alone face housing discrimination in terms of benefits payments, tax credits, and housing allocation and tenure (Reynolds, 2008; Oswin, 2010; Ramdas, 2012). Despite the intersection of space, dwelling and the reproduction of moral values around how we dwell, the lived experience of those who live alone have gone largely unremarked upon in Urban Geography (Roseniel, 2006). As coupledness marked by cohabitation includes same sex couples, it is important not to

¹ Peripatetic boaters in the UK are an imagined community grouped by their choice to live bow-to-stern on waterways that span many miles and meander through wards, boroughs and counties with no clear boundaries. This convivial formation is commonly known as the 'linear village' (Bowles 2015).

conflate heteronormativity and heterosexuality; opposite-sex intimacies may challenge heteronormativity as same-sex intimacies have the power to uphold it.

I follow Wilkinson (2013) who proposes that the 'ideological force of couple culture' in Britain (Budgeon, 2008: p302) and discrimination against intimacies that fall outside this norm can be described as mononormativity (see Barker and Langdridge, 2010; Pieper and Bauer, 2005; Wilkinson, 2012) (Wilkinson, 2013, p207). This research asks to what extent mononormativity pervades into urban space through a focus on boaters who live alone on the waterways in London, which does not mean that they are necessarily single (see Duncan and Phillips, 2012). Those who live alone may describe their relationship status and interpersonal lives in any number of ways, including coupledness. The point here is to closely examine those living outside coupledness marked by cohabitation. Itinerant boat dwellers in London are a valuable lens for this research as between 2012- 2016 they saw a 57% increase in their population (CRT 2016a) - the majority of whom live alone (CRT, 2016b). The overwhelming majority of these boaters hold a continuous cruising licence; that is they have no permanent mooring and must move every two weeks to a new place, covering a minimum of 20 miles in one direction per year (CRT, 2012).

During research in 2015, I carried out 17 interviews with Continuous Cruisers in London. Although household demographics and coupledness wasn't my focus, it struck me that most of the participants lived alone and enjoyed the anonymity, freedom and independence that boating gave them both spatially and in their personal lives. Participants described a kind of refuge in their 'alternative' living situation that deviated from normative ideals of coupledness and the nuclear family;

Living on a boat feels like a relationship. I have real commitment issues and I feel like I am totally committed to my boat in a way that I've never been totally committed to anything in my life. It's a stand-in boyfriend and people accept that. (Katie)

It goes back to me being able to live how I want to live because I don't have to conform in a way that makes me feel uncomfortable. It gives me permission because if any one says anything or criticises my choices, I can just say 'it's boat life'. I feel that there are more single women on boats.
(Katharine)

My friends are up to stuff, but I've got the boat. With that responsibility there is a dependency and that is reassuring. It gives me stuff to do in the evening- I have to go back to light the fire to have it warm. [The boat] is a bit like a girlfriend- I don't want to talk about leaving her, it's disrespectful.
(Ben)

Apart from Benjamin Bowles (2015) valuable research on boaters in the South East of England, there has been a clear lack of critical research on the lived experience of Continuous Cruisers specifically, and none with a focus on London. This population has however, received much media attention, usually framing them as people who live in London in alternative ways in order to escape housing poverty (see The Morning Star, 2017). This research hopes to offer a more nuanced look at the lives of Continuous Cruisers, problematising the homogenising media portrayal to develop a broader and deeper understanding of unique lived experiences through participant observation and in-depth interviews. Do Continuous Cruisers in London evade mononormativity? To what extent have Continuous Cruisers who live alone carved out an autonomous space for themselves on the waterways?

Literature Review

The married household is now in a minority for the first time on record making up just under half of all households (ONS, 2011). This has much to do with a move beyond a focus

on heterosexual marriage to accept both heterosexual and same-sex cohabitation as an 'alternative to legal partnership status' (ONS, 2011). Being recognised as a couple no longer pivots around marriage; instead 'coupledom has come to be marked by cohabitation' (Roseneil, 2006). The normalisation of cohabitation (Ermisch and Francesconi, 2000) reinforces moral values around coupledom (Lewis, 2001; Jamieson et al, 2002; Duncan, Barlow and James, 2005) that are protected and promoted by the state. Where the relationship between sexuality and space has been discussed during Geography's 'queer turn' (Bell and Valentine, 1995; Browne et al, 2007; Hubbard, 2012), revealing the ways in which space is heterosexualized, geographic research is only just beginning to look specifically at how the reification of coupledom as a household unit serves to normalize coupledom (see Ramdas, 2012; 2014; Wilkinson, 2013). Wilkinson (2013) extends Adrienne Rich's (1980) description of the social and economic reproduction of heterosexual relationships as 'compulsory heterosexuality', to describe 'compulsory coupledom', arguing that heterosexuality should not be conflated with heteronormativity. She describes that those who live outside coupledom is one of the key omissions of geographies of exclusion and inequality, describing a culture of mononormativity in Britain (Wilkinson, 2013, p206). Geography has paid little attention to the extent coupledom is written into the residential landscape and housing is designed with long-term cohabiting couples in mind (see Klocker et al, 2012). And so when Johnston and Longhurst describe homes as 'valorised as sites of heteronormative relations' (2010, p43), it begs the question whether homes are also valorised as sites of mononormative relations.

This research will use the emerging work on 'home-city geographies' (Blunt and Sheringham, 2018) which forefronts the importance of the relationship between 'lived experiences of urban homes and the contested domestication of urban space' with a look to how home-city geographies can connect homemaking in the city and the city as home

(Blunt and Sheringham, 2018: p1). It will analyse the lived experience of Continuous Cruisers who live alone whose intimacies may fall outside the conventions of coupledom but also whose experience of home itself may reveal non-human intimacies that allow a particular refuge from mononormative conventions.

This research will draw on Plummer's 'inclusive concept' of intimate citizenship which broadens understandings of intimacy that are 'less focussed on the sexual' Plummer (2001: 238). Intimate citizenship includes personal relationships that do not revolve around sexuality in order to level the precedence that mononormative sexual-love relationships take over other attachments such as such as 'single parenting', 'the value of living alone', 'voluntary childlessness'; and 'adult friendships' (Plummer, 2001: p238). Intimate citizenship could be good to think with when we consider the discrimination of those who fall outside of 'appropriate' intimacies'; that is those who are not a cohabiting couple (Wilkinson, 2013: p206) and may privilege other forms of intimacy, such as friendship. Feminist scholarship has described friendships as 'hidden solidarities' (Spencer L and Pahl R, 2006) and 'personal communities' (Bunnell et. al., 2011; p10) concepts that show the value and need for such intimacies to be acknowledged alongside cohabiting coupledom. Concepts of intimate citizenship and feminist scholarship on friendship are know to those in its orbit, but have not percolated much further into geography or urban scholarship as a specific area of research. Bunnell et. al. attribute this neglect to the way "community' and 'neighbourhood' have been perceived in the social sciences' as 'harmoniously functioning units of human interaction' without an analysis of interpersonal relations or intimacies (2011, p7). The little critical research on boaters that there is has eclipsed analysis of intimacies among this group with a focus on community. Bowles (2015) study of boat dwellers looked to 'communities of practice', assuming an ideal of commune living with

certain cohesions and solidarities which elides friendships and intimacies that underpin the lived experience of individual boaters. This proposed research aims to not only to add to the limited and emerging work on those who live alone through geographies of exclusion and inequality but also further understandings of the intimacies of everyday life and everyday living that support Continuous Cruisers that live alone and analyse ideals of coupledness from this angle.

Research questions:

1. To what extent can Continuous Cruisers living alone in London be understood through spatial understandings of mononormativity?
 - To what extent are those populating the linear village in London evading moral values and mononormative ideals of coupledness that pervade spatial discrimination of city ?
 - How might Continuous Cruisers who live alone in London challenge repeated and habitual understandings of home which conflate it with mononormative notions?

- How can the lived experience of Continuous Cruisers who live alone in London be seen through the wider lens of intimate citizenship?
- What can notions of intimate citizenship add to understandings of Continuous Cruisers who live alone in London through an analysis of their lived experience?

Methodology

Proposed Methodology

I have been a Continuous Cruiser in London for 4 years, and so am embedded in continuous cruising relations and networks. A key part of the methodology will involve ethnographic techniques and participant observation of group meet ups and on the waterways and towpaths. From May-June 2019 I will carry out 10 in-depth interviews with male and female Continuous Cruisers who live alone. Participants will be sought through online forums I am part of and through snowballing. The overall research design will be flexible so as to be open to adjustment if necessary. I wish to use semi-structured interviews as it is important for there to be scope for participants to deviate from the questions and co-produce the work by having space to elaborate and tell their own story, as the questions will be formulated around intimate relationships and ideas of home. Participant observation of meet ups among boating groups will also be a valuable means to understand interpersonal relationships among boaters which may offer a source of support.

Data Analysis

Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967): I will code repeated themes or ideas that come from interviews and participant observation. These codes will be categorised to reveal themes relating to living alone on the waterways in London.

Ethical Issues

- **Informed consent and anonymity:** The principle of informed consent will be adhered to throughout the research process. Informants will be assured that their anonymity will be preserved and of their right to end their involvement in the research at any point (Oliver, 2004: p7). Interviews will be recorded audibly with participants' full knowledge and consent.
- **Relationship status and sensitive information:** Interviews will discuss personal relationships that may be of a sensitive nature. Thus, it will be crucial to ensure that they are fully aware of the purposes of the research and anonymity and confidentiality will be key. Any identifying personal information will not be included and participants will be told that they can choose not to answer questions or end the interview at any time.
- **Context:** I also have to be careful in framing spatial discrimination alongside other housing discriminations. Any discussion on spatial discriminations of those who live outside of the norms of a cohabiting couple, must be clear not to elide other pervasive and pernicious forms of housing discrimination, such as the clear housing discrimination that runs along race lines (Shelter, 2004). Over 70% owned their boats outright, a further 11% said they owned their boat with a loan or mortgage (CRT,

2016b) and 77% in London and identified as 'White' rising to 89% when 'White Other' is included (CRT, 2016b)- this not representative of the super diversity of London and does not reflect the housing poverty felt by 'London's struggling multi-ethnic, working classes' (Watt and Minton, 2016: p205).

- **Positionality:** I have to be aware of my own positionally as a white, boat-woman who lives alone. As the researcher, I will aim to keep as objective a stance as possible.

Ethics Form- see Appendix 1.

Proposed Timeframe

Period	Activity
March 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature review • Study of research methods and design (including final interview questions)
April 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk work and reading • Participant observation/ field notes • Field notes • Recruit participants • Conduct interviews
May 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk work and Reading • Participant Observation/ field notes • Conduct Interviews
June 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk work and Reading • Conduct Interviews • Data Analysis
July 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk work and Reading • Data Analysis • Write up
August 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write up • Submission

Risk Assessment:

See Appendix 2.

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Appendix

1. Ethics

ID Number (automatically generated)

QMUL Ethics Filter – for research involving human participants

Complete this form electronically and submit to the ethics coordinator h.covill@qmul.ac.uk. You will receive an automated response upon submission; your supervisor will also receive a copy of your submission and may need to talk to you if they have concerns. You will receive an initial decision on the outcome of your application within 15 working days the possible outcomes are: a. Automatic approval b. Your application needs to be

discussed with your head of department or supervisor or c. A full ethics application is required.

If you already know your research will require a full ethics application please complete the form found at: <http://connect.qmul.ac.uk/research/ethicscommittee/index.html>

All questions with * must be completed.

Failure to complete this form accurately or falsify any information will result in the research not being indemnified by QMUL.

Any research involving NHS patients, human tissue, staff or premises should be submitted to <http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk> for ethical review via their online application form.

*Name	
Student Number if appropriate	
*Email address	
Programme of Study (e.g. Undergraduate Geography Programme, Taught Education Masters)	
*Department	
*Title of study	
*300 word minimum summary of the research:	
*Supervisor's (Principal Investigator) Name	
*Supervisor's email address	
*I confirm that Queen Mary University London is responsible for this study and that I am not receiving any funding for this project (other than that provided by myself or through my course) If in receipt of funding – who is the funding body Level of funding	Yes

If the answer is Yes to any of questions 1-13 an application to the full ethics committee will be required, the form can be found at

<http://connect.qmul.ac.uk/research/ethicscommittee/index.html>

	Principle	Yes	No	Comments
	Are the participants under 16		x	
	Could the participants be classified as vulnerable adults		x	
	Do the participants have learning difficulties		x	
	Does the research involve using or collecting human tissue		x	
	Could this research uncover illegal activities (drug use, immigration etc.)		x	
	Could this research cause stress or anxiety in the participant		x	
	Will you be asking questions relating to issues of a personal sensitive nature	x		
	Could this research bring the University into disrepute		x	

	Does the research involve the person taking a drug of any description – even over the counter medicines		x	
	Does the research involve an intervention e.g. exercise, hypnotherapy		x	
	Does the research rely on covert observation of the participants		x	
	Will this research be conducted in the participants home	x		
	Will the participant be paid – not just expenses		x	
	Will the data collected be sent or used overseas		x	

2. Risk Assessment

GEOGRAPHY RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

FIELD / LOCATION WORK

School of Geography SAFETY HANDBOOK should be referred to when completing this form
Form must be completed electronically and forwarded to the authorised person (Students - Supervisor / Research Staff - Project Leader / Academic Staff - Head of School) who must check and sign. Completed form must be

e-mailed to the School Safety Advisor michelle.day@qmul.ac.uk 5 days before the date of travel.

PERSON FILLING IN RISK
ASSESSMENT

PERSONS COVERED BY

RISK ASSESSMENT

(no more than 5 persons
can be listed on this form)

ADDRESS & MOBILE

(one line per individual)

Staff UG PGT PGR

DATES

LOCATION(S)

OVERNIGHT STAY YES NO N/A

TRANSPORT

(e.g. car, flight information,
eligibility to drive checked)

ACCOMMODATION

ENVIRONMENT

(e.g. urban, mountainous,
lowland river)

NATURE OF WORK

(e.g. conference, survey,
sediment sampling)

PERMISSION OBTAINED

(on-site documentation)

YES NO N/A

ON-SITE CONTACT (names,
address, mobile)

IDENTIFICATION OF HAZARD

Hazards categories:

Natural Physical (e.g.
extreme weather, mountains,
cliffs, marshes, water)

YES NO Assess all hazard
categories to the left and if you
have selected yes, identify and fill
out the hazards below.

Biological (e.g. plants,
animals, soil, water microorganisms)

YES NO Risk - hazard severity (low,
medium, high) and likelihood

Chemical (e.g. pesticides,
contaminated soils,
chemicals)

YES NO Control Measures - specify
steps taken to minimise risk

Societal and other hazards
affecting personal safety

(e.g. equipment, buildings,
transport hazards (DVT),
traffic, crime, health, public
order)

YES NO

Hazard Category Risk:

Hazard

Control Measure

Hazard Category Risk:

Hazard

Control Measure

Hazard Category

Hazard

Hazard Category

Hazard

Hazard Category

Hazard

Risk:

Risk:

Risk:

Control Measure

Control Measure

Control Measure

Optional additional

information (e.g. you have been to this site before and assessed the risks)

EMERGENCIES

Specify any relevant medical/health information (e.g. allergies, medication, details of nearest hospital emergency room)

Next of kin contact details for all persons listed on this form (address, mobile)

*one line per individual

Full name

Signature

Full name

Countersignature

Hazard Category

Hazard

Risk:

Control Measures

Control Measures

Control Measures

Control Measures

Control Measures

Control Measures

Control Measures

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Control Measure

Hazard Category

Hazard

Hazard Category

Hazard

Hazard Category

Hazard

Risk:

Risk:

Risk:

Control Measure

Control Measure

Control Measure

Additional hazards may be required - please add to form below