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QUEER CAPITOL HILL

A HISTORIC WALKING TOUR

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BACKGROUND

The stories we tell can reveal so much about who we are and how we see ourselves. However, museums and informal learning spaces have traditionally upheld heteronormative worldviews. Given the close relationship between identity and learning experiences, museums and places of informal education have a unique opportunity to center queer history and social issues (Mills).

Despite queer stories being present throughout history, the discipline of queer history is a relatively recent development. Examining history through a queer lens can be challenging due to the rapidly shifting language surrounding queer concepts and the fact that historical figures may not have expressed their sexuality in ways that correspond with modern labels and categories.

When institutions make an effort to provide programming for queer audiences, they can strengthen their local queer community as well as that community's relationship to the institution (Ferentinos). Highlighting queerness in historical narratives can balance out the predominantly heteronormative perspectives that have been traditionally presented, leading to a richer understanding of the past.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to create a walking tour that explores the stories of queer folks and their communities. More specifically, we look at how these people and their stories shape the cultural, social, and political landscape of Seattle and Capitol Hill. The tour seeks to promote awareness, education, and appreciation of queer history while fostering a sense of pride and belonging among all. The goals of this program include:

- Increasing accessibility to our shared queer history
- Building bonds among guests, queer or not
- Helping queer folks explore their identities through a historical lens
- Recognizing, normalizing, and celebrating queerness in the world at large



TOUR GROUP ON APRIL 15TH, 2023 AT THE AIDS MEMORIAL PATHWAY

DELIVERABLE

In-Person Walking Tour

- Held on April 1st, 8th, and 15th, 2023
- A total of 40 guests attended cumulatively
- Roughly one hour in duration
- The route extends about one mile beginning and ending at the AIDS Memorial Pathway
- We make eight formal stops to tell the story of how Capitol Hill became Seattle's queer neighborhood

Online Map

- Designed to help get the information to those who could not attend one of the in-person tours
- Formatted using ARCGIS StoryMaps
- Find it by scanning the QR Code below!



SCAN HERE TO ACCESS THE ONLINE MAP!

PROCESS

Logistical Planning

- The route was designed to maximize accessibility and proximity to historic locations
- Historic Seattle promoted the event via social media but many guests heard about it by word of mouth
- Admission regulated with a google form

Content

- The topics covered can be difficult and must be discussed with intention and respect
- Many historical sources factored into the tour's broader thread/narrative (see Fig. 1)

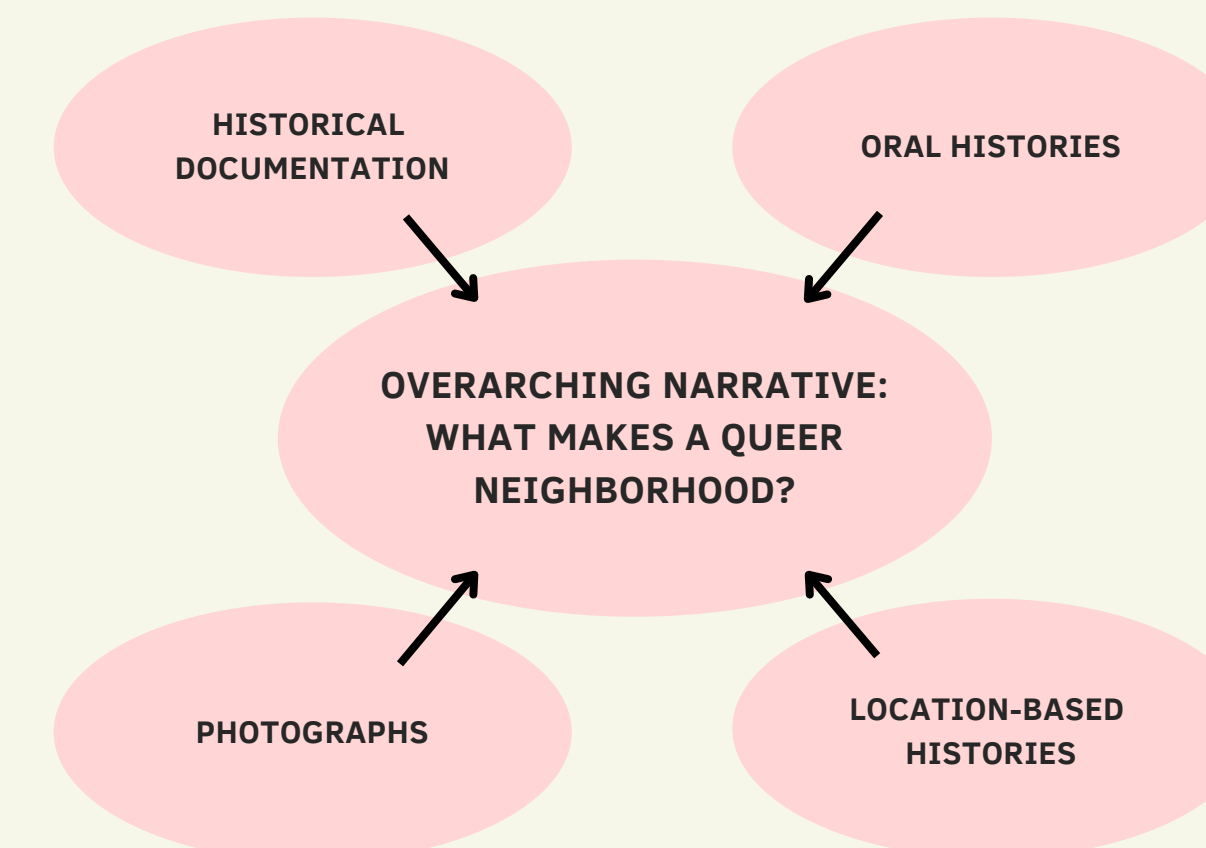


Fig. 1

EVALUATION

I handed out QR codes to an online exit survey at the end of the tour. Of the **40** total guests, I received **13** responses. They included generally positive feedback and yielded the following results:

- **100%** of respondents would recommend the tour to a friend
- **92%** of respondents felt this tour changed how they felt about somewhere they had previously visited
- **85%** of respondents felt connected to other people on the tour
- **70%** of respondents felt their identity was validated by the stories they heard
- **54%** agreed that the tour changed their relationship to the queer community of this area
- The tour needs to include more content regarding POC-specific spaces and stories

CONCLUSIONS

There is a need for more programming surrounding queer identities and queer history. While these topics can be difficult to center in a public program, the public is ready to have these discussions. Many guests experienced the stories we told and were able to offer their own firsthand accounts, blurring the lines between the past and present. The hope is that this begins more conversations about incorporating queer history into education more broadly. By cultivating a richer understanding of the past, we gain new perspectives that can shift how we imagine the future.

Suggestions to further improve accessibility and content:

- Adapt to self-guided audio tour, video, or online stream
- Conduct and incorporate more oral histories
- Solicit more community input overall
- Continue to retell these stories and assign them new meaning as time goes on

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Thesis Committee

- Lane Eagles, Ph.D.** - UW History, UW Museology, Committee Chair
- Laurie Marhoefer, Ph.D.** - UW History, Historian of Queer and Trans People
- Jeff Murdock** - Preservation Advocacy Manager at Historic Seattle

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REFERENCES

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