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## Queer Rural Youth Online: A Digital Ethnography

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# Queer Rural Youth Online

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A Digital Ethnography

# Overview

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# Theoretical Background

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# Digital Ethnography

- Ethnography conducted online.
- Kozinets (2010) argues that digital communities are extensions of offline reality.
- Key authors: Turkle (1997), Van Doorn (2011) and Boellstorff (2008).



# Queer Theory

- Early scholars such as Murray (1965) and Treichler (1987) pioneered the field.
- Contemporary authors: Manago (2014), Cserni and Talmud (2015) and Berger (2022).

# Identity and Performativity

- Foucault (1976) and Butler (1990).
- Poststructuralist views of gender.
- Butler views gender as performative and self-enforcing.



# Social Capital

- The network of relationships between people, from which they can garner support and prestige (Gittel 1988).
- Cserni and Talmud (2015).
- Social capital lowers the risk of adverse health conditions (Kim, Subramanian and Kawachi 2006).





# Research Design



# Research Site and Methodology

- This study is a one-shot case study design.
- Combination of ethnographic interviews and textual analysis.
- January to March 2023.
- Research Sites: Subcommunities on Reddit and Twitter (now known as X).



# Findings

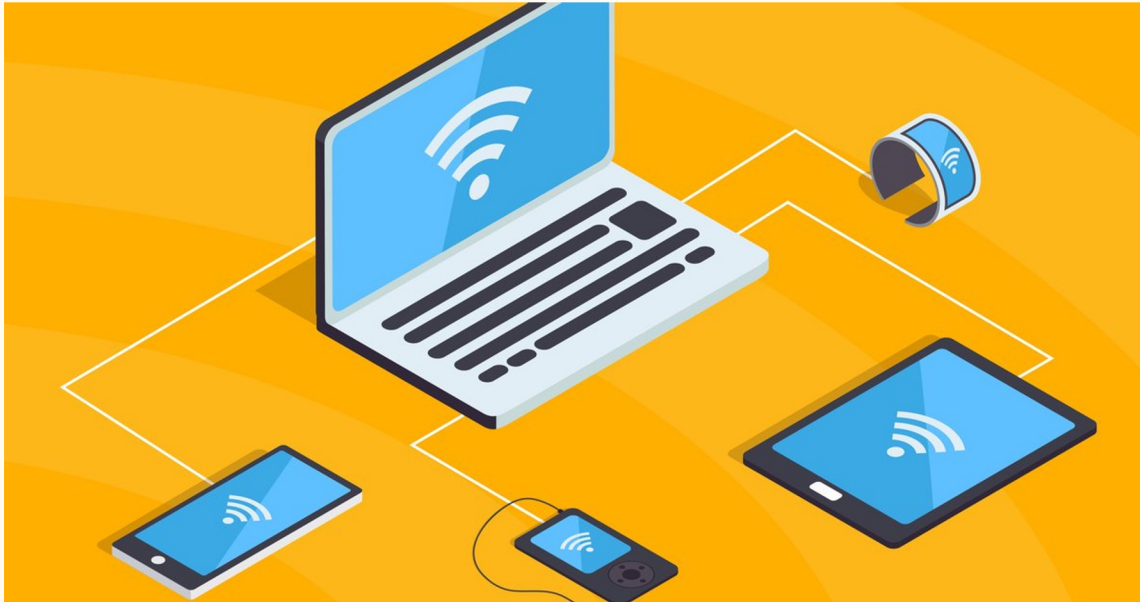


# The Queer Rural Experience

- Queer youth in rural areas navigate complex digital spaces, restrictive school policies, and precariously fragile support systems.



# Internet Access and Policy Subversion



“I told all of my friends when I found a new VPN. My school even banned YouTube, so I got popular fast” - Travis

“Smarter people than me share tricks for breaking school filters. I see reposting them as my special way of paying it forward” -  
Travis

# Online Dating and Friendships

## Where to find other gay girls?

Travel

Hiii, I (F21) am trying to meet more girls in my area but have really been struggling recently and am looking for reccomendations. I don't really get approached at the gay bar and apps like HER and LEX are dead asf.

# Sexual Exploration Online

“The Internet’s different. You can learn about sex however you want, at your own pace. And you don’t have to worry about a 50 year old [a sex-ed teacher] leaving out the important stuff” - Michael

“Our sex ed teacher was the math teacher, and they didn’t even bring up the possibility that two gay guys could exist and have sex. I felt singled out because everyone in the room joked about me being the only gay guy. Or, at least, the only out gay guy” - Travis



# Migration

- Other users sometimes encourage youth to migrate to coastal urban centers.
- Some youth experience onward migration to larger cities.

**Best city's to move to as a gay?**

Seattle? San Francisco? LA? I need endorsements on places **to move to** guys. Seriously. Portland isn't going **to** cut it long term 🙄



# Migrate or Stay?

“When I’m online, I can act like my true self. I don’t worry about what my mom will think of me, or what my brother has to say. I can just be me” - Pru

“We have a responsibility to take our hometowns, the good and the bad, and make it better for all of us” - Pru

# Conclusions

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Thank You!



Q&A

