Spatial Obstacles to Shared “Crip” & LGBTQ Cultures

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INTRODUCTION

Online communities are receiving praise for providing new frontiers to marginalized populations with disabilities and LGBTQ identities. They provide unique outlets to generate media from within the community, which in turn influences broader national discussions among the public, mainstream media, and officials. (Figure 1) Moreover, participation in online “Crip” and LGBTQ cultures present safe forums for populations to overcome geographic boundaries and control the disclosure of identities. This aspatial conception of emerging online communities is thus said to unite marginalized identities and provide meaningful representation of community members.

METHODS

To explore spatial situation of LGBTQ identities, persons with disabilities, and Internet accessibility, I draw from three national datasets. National datasets describing LGBTQ identities are fraught with problems. Issues related to stigma and the stifling of self-identification suggest several underreporting in conservative and rural areas. And although ACS data are available at the county level, these only capture same-sex households. To address those shortcomings, I use national GSS dataset reports of LGBTQ “acquaintance reporting” to find whether different place types have varying LGBTQ composition. County-level tallies of disabilities were made available by the 2013 ACS. Using a spatial clustering “hotspot” analysis, I composed a national map to report which counties have disproportionately high levels of self-reported disabilities. Finally, I draw from the FCC’s National Broadband Map to identify all locations without any wireline Internet providers. This allows all locations without Internet access to be matched with LGBTQ and disability populations. The application of these three datasets allows researchers to identify the environments in which both populations live to verify whether either can participate in emerging online communities.

RESULTS

Partial dimensions of Internet access

National Broadband Map data demonstrate that the “Digital Divide” has persisted, as a pattern of rural exclusion describes Internet provision throughout Midwestern and Southern regions. Farms, specifically, present locations where LGBTQ acquaintanceship lags. All off-farm rural areas, however, are similar to metropolitan areas in composition.

CONCLUSIONS

The mediating role of online communities and representation is regionally-segmented. Figure 4 offers spatial context to depict how regional constraints limit who can participate and find representation. The broad gap in rural America suggests that despite having disproportionately high prevalences of disabilities, people in those areas are less likely to benefit from participation in online communities. Physically intensive labor sectors and the absence of healthcare facilities present rural plights that are not prioritized by metropolitan users. Moreover, the promotion of pedestrian infrastructure to address mobility is pushed as a universal aim despite having limited regional benefits. Media, officials, and planners that accept the online narrative of disability experiences reaffirm an urban bias in how they recognize and respond to disabilities. Addressing regional variation in mobility, job accessibility, health care, and official representation is necessary to capture distinct rural phenomenon left out of the national narrative.

“I can’t come out” and “I can’t go out”

Spatial inequality and cultural inequality

LGBTQ identities have a near-constant distribution across regions. Nevertheless, broadband gaps within rural America present participation from LGBTQ identities within those areas. Whereas persons with disabilities encounter structural obstacles, cultural and value-related challenges emerge among this group. The inability to find a partner or publicly display personal identities are made worse by stigma and rural dimensions of masculinity. Although the emergence of online communities promotes dialogues of inclusion and LGBTQ policy reforms, rural contexts of isolation are overlooked by media narratives of social progress.