

# CONCEPTUALIZING RURAL QUEERNESS AND ITS CHALLENGES FOR THE POLITICS OF VISIBILITY

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## ABSTRACT

Historically rooted in cities, GLBT identities and communities have been mapped onto a narrative of rural-to-urban migration. Often represented as homophobic, rural space is valued insofar as it is left behind. This article posits rurality as an often-ignored yet pervasive thread of identity, which is absent from hegemonic conceptualizations of queer visibility. While urban queer visibility politics center on the different-but-equal paradigm, I argue that rural queer visibility politics involve a delicate balance of queerness and localness, putting forth an approach of different-but-similar. The construction of GLBT identities in non-urban contexts may therefore complicate dominant conceptions of the closet model.

## INTRODUCTION

This article will conceptualize “the rural” as an alternative mode or intersection of identification that works to complicate, and in some cases run counter to, the basic tenets of queer visibility politics. Recent critiques have shown that much queer theory “unquestionably posits an urbanized subject” (Creed and Ching 1997:7) without considering the vital role of the rural or rus-

tic. Only a handful of works (namely in the disciplines of human geography and literary and cultural studies) have examined sexual identity and community as it manifests outside of North American urban centres (Gray 2009:10). As such, rural places are continually deemed significant insofar as they are left behind; they are presented as playing an unimportant role in the actual constitution of authentic queer identity (Halberstam 2005; Weston 1998). As Creed and Ching note, the urban operates as the assumed reference within much social theory, and this “convergence of rural and urban lifestyles . . . overshadows the continuing significance of rural-based identities” (1997:4). Rural identity, culture, and experience is itself marginalized within both academia and popular culture.

I will begin by briefly discussing the spatiality of queerness and queer subjectivity, noting in particular the inherent urbanness of gay or queer subjectivity. I posit rurality as an often-ignored yet immensely pervasive thread of identity, which is absent from hegemonic, and I would add, urban, conceptualizations of queer visibility. Drawing on my own ethnographic research among GLBT individuals in rural Nova Scotia, I then move into a more detailed discussion of the politics of visibility, highlighting the ways in which rurality is incompatible with the basic tenets of mainstream urban queer visibility politics. While queer visibility politics champion the “out-ness” and visibility of sexual difference as instrumental in achieving such legitimation and liberation, the familial reliance, local power dynamics, class relations and cultural marginalization inherent to rural areas render them ill-suited to such strategies of visibility.

## THE SPACE OF QUEER SUBJECTIVITY

The notion of space has become a useful lens through which to understand both the construction of queer identity and community, and the operationalization of power and oppression (Brown 2000). Indeed, how we inhabit space, both materially and meta-

phorically, plays a fundamental role in the formation of our identities, outlooks, strategies for survival, and communities (Brown 2000). As Ahmed points out, sexual orientation is a matter of how we reside in space; it determines the direction of our desire and with whom we inhabit space (Ahmed 2006:1). While space is crucial to the constitution and reproduction of social identity, social identities, meanings and relations likewise play an active role in producing and reproducing space (Valentine 2002:146). As anthropologist Mary Gray argues, spatial relations play a pivotal role in the particularities and meaning of individuals' claims to queerness (Gray 2009:8).

Foucault (1990), among others, has pointed to the fundamental relationship between space, sexuality, and power. More than a representation of power, space materializes power; it is the dimension of social relations through which power and knowledge become actualized within the world (Brown 2000:3). Indeed, spatial relations segregate and compartmentalize human interaction; controlling presence and absence, as well as inclusion and exclusion, spatial relations work to materialize oppressive and disciplinary relations of power (Brown 2000:3). For instance, Foucault points out that medical and legal definitions of non-normative or queer sexual acts during the late seventeenth century resulted in their debasement and degradation, as well as their segregation and compartmentalization (Foucault 1990:3). As Henri Lefebvre puts it, "space subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships" (1991:73); "[it] is what permits fresh actions to occur, while. . . prohibiting. . . others" (Lefebvre 1991:73).

Homophobia and heterosexism thus operate through the production of space. Indeed, the production and experience of everyday space serves to reinforce heterosexual hegemony in that educational, religious, legal, and medical discourses work to degrade and constrain the public presence of queerness (Berlant and Warner 1998:554). Berlant and Warner point to the institution of intimacy in particular, which works to segregate "personal life" from the public sphere and renders sex in public, or more spe-

cifically, queer public sex cultures, out of place (1998:553). Judith Butler's notion of performativity is also a useful lens through which to understand the heterosexing of space. For Butler, much like the gendering of bodies, the heterosexing of space is an act of performance that is naturalized through repetition and regulation (Butler 1999:25,33). That is, the seeming naturalness of heterosexual space is maintained through subtle and repetitive performances of heteronormative sexuality and gender, including bodily displays of public affection, advertisements and window displays, gendered mannerisms and dress, and conversations and music (Somerville 2000:141; Valentine 2000).

Berlant and Warner, however, point out that the heterosexuality embedded within everyday spaces is not necessarily fixed or stable (Berlant and Warner 1998:555; Valentine 2000). The instability of heteronormative space allows queer individuals to restructure it; they can produce their own spaces or "read heterosexual space against the grain" (Valentine 2000:5), experiencing it and producing it differently. So while on the one hand, everyday space is produced and reinforced as heterosexual, this hegemonic construction can be subverted. As such, the "queering" of urban public space has been historically linked to the emergence of gay politics during early twentieth-century America (D'Emilio 1989). For example, throughout the 20th century, the establishment of gay spaces, such as parades, cafes, bars, bookstores, and neighbourhoods, created the possibility for collective consciousness, struggle, and activity (D'Emilio 1989; Valentine 2002). Such spaces provided public venues in which political consciousness and movements for public recognition could emerge; they provided safety, visibility, and a sense of commonality (D'Emilio 1989; Valentine 2002). In this way, gay culture has been theorized as having a special relationship with urban space.

Much of gay and lesbian history has therefore mirrored the history of the city, with major urban centers being intrinsically linked to the formation of global gay politics and the historical construction of gay identity and community (Halberstam

2005:34; Weston 1998:33). As D'Emilio points out, gay identity emerged in concert with the historical development of urban capitalism, which spearheaded a boom of rural to urban migration and transformed the role of the family and the meanings behind heterosexual relations (1989:102). Similarly, Gayle Rubin, among others, has argued that erotic dissidents required the anonymity and heterogeneity of an urban setting (Rubin 1984). Certainly, while the size, density, and diversity of urban populations work to insulate and alienate individuals from one another, such factors have also been theorized as providing the ideal setting for subcultural formations (Tonkiss 2005:8). The city's capacities to create visibility, consolidate capital, and foster political power among spatially bound groups rendered it the key site for the formation of early gay and lesbian identities (Gray 2009:7).

## QUEERING RURALITY

The development of gay community and identity has paralleled processes of urbanization. As Halberstam points out, the construction of gay subjectivity is itself embedded within a narrative of rural to urban migration, which maps the psychological journey of "coming out" onto a physical journey to the city (Halberstam 2005:36-7; Weston 1998:39-40). Following Mary Gray, this can be understood as a matter of narrative. As such narrative structures "do the cultural work" of privileging one narrative at the expense of others (2009:9). In this way, she argues, the community histories of North American gays "cohere through and hinge on unrelenting narratives that imagine rural spaces as . . . closet[s]" or "premodern trappings" (Gray 2009:9). Purportedly isolated from gay identity, this narrative of progress positions the rural as the necessary shadow against which the political accomplishment of urban gay visibility can be measured and its superior urban spatiality sustained.

In this sense, gayness is configured through a symbolic opposition between the urban and the rural, whereby the latter is po-

sitioned as a closet from which an authentic, metropolitan sexuality must emerge (Halberstam 2005:37; Weston 1998:39-40). Queer subjectivity has been situated within a “linear, modernist trajectory” (Halberstam 2005:36-7), with urban GLBT or queer identities serving as markers of modernity. As both Halberstam and Weston point out, the image of the escape from the countryside into the anonymity and diversity of urban space was embedded within the gay subject from the start (Halberstam 2005:10; Weston 1998:40). A “beacon of tolerance and . . . community” (Weston 1998:40) for queer individuals, the city has been cast as a refuge from the oppression and discipline of small-town surveillance. And much like the distinctions of right-left and east-west discussed by Ahmed (2006:14), the rural-urban distinction is not neutral or even; rather, the urban serves as the straight line, while the rural is a deviation.

Indeed, for Weston, “the gay imaginary” is a symbolic space that configures gayness through a hierarchical distinction between urban and rural space (1998:40). That is, queerness is not only thought to be embedded within an urban location; it is also situated within a symbolic opposition between urban and rural life (Weston 1998:55). This opposition reveals the rural to be the devalued term, and renders rural queers as out of place or somehow “stuck” in a place they would rather not be (Halberstam 2003:162). For the rural-born queer, the process of coming out can be seen as embodying what Ahmed calls “a migrant orientation” (Ahmed 2006:10); that is, “facing toward a home that has been lost, and to a place that is not yet home” (Ahmed 2006:10). Rural space is often represented as inherently oppressive, and characterized by highly traditional gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality (Bell and Valentine 1995:115). It is also portrayed as “a locus of persecution and gay absence” (Weston 1998:40) with tales of isolation, prejudice, and physical violence characterizing the experiences of the queers who live there. And rural queer subjectivities, if discussed at all, are framed as lacking or incomplete (Gray 2009:10). So while rurality plays a key function, albeit as the “other” against which the production ur-

ban queer identities can be measured, much work on sexuality and space fails to consider rural space at all. Not only is rurality neglected with regard to queer theorizing, but the spatial construction of rural queer identities and communities themselves are also absent.

Before entering a more detailed discussion of rurality, it is important to note that queer experiences of space play out on a number of spatial scales, which are “porous, inter-related and provisional spaces” (Valentine 2002:151). Battles over queer rights are fought at the scale of the nation as well as the body and the globe (Valentine 2002:151). Certainly, battles over issues such as AIDS are global crises that are interrelated with and reworked by processes and initiatives formed at the local, and even individual or bodily, level. Likewise, local processes and initiatives are constituted through the global; they are the “product of interactions between local social relations and global influences” (Valentine 2002:151). Western, metropolitan queer identity thus gets reworked and re-contextualized as it is constructed and experienced within non-western, as well as non-metropolitan spatial and cultural contexts (Halberstam 2005; Phillips 2000).

Western models of sexuality and sexual liberation, Phillips argues, should be regarded not as “the ultimate achievement”, but as something that has been produced in distinct conditions (2000:22). That is, the spatial production and experience of sexuality in the specific economic and social conditions of Europe and North America is produced and experienced very differently, and has very different meaning, in non-western and non-metropolitan locales (Phillips 2000:22). Therefore, while recent communication technologies, such as the internet, have allowed those in such locales to participate in “global gay life” the identity of queer sexuality as it is constructed and experienced within non-metropolitan and non-western places does not mirror that of the west or the metropolitan, rather, it is a reworking of global influences within local cultural contexts (Phillips 2000:45).

Indeed, Kennedy and Davis point out that the queer spaces

which proliferated in the United States during the early twentieth century mark the beginning of a distinctly modern as well as western, and metropolitan, queer identity (1993:8). They note that the queer identities that prevail in contemporary urban Europe and America are unique to both this culture and time period (Kennedy and Davis 1993:8). Accordingly, Foucault argues that the notion of a gay identity and community emerged during a time when homosexual acts were becoming increasingly medicalized and pathologized (1990:44). For example, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, “the homosexual” became both a personage and a species, which prompted those identified as such to demand acknowledgement and legitimacy as a collectively identified community (Foucault 1990:43,101). This dominant model of sexual identity is characterized as the “closet model”, whereby gay subjectivity initially lies dormant, “awaiting only the right set of circumstances to emerge” (Halberstam 2003:163). Mobilizing a collective understanding of what it means to be queer or gay, these modes of self-identification, Weston points out, classify gay people as a finite, bounded group; they employ, and universalize, a Western conception of selfhood in which sexual acts and desires are purported “thoroughly to infuse a self” (1998:33).

While such a model of sexual identity has been privileged within much current and historical queer narrative, rural queerness can complicate or work against such identity claims. Indeed, Halberstam reminds us that not all rural queers leave home to become queer; thus, we must consider the possibilities that “the condition of ‘staying put’” may offer in terms of producing alternative or complex queer subjectivities (2005:27). For instance, with their relative isolation from metropolitan queer identity, some rural queers may not position sexuality as the “definitive characteristic of self” (Wilson 2000:210), because doing so could easily negate other parts of their identity, such as ethnicity, class, and local familial history. Rather, rural sexual communities must be understood as a “complex interactive model of space, embodiment, locality, and desire” (Halberstam 2005:45);

and they may exist in proximity to, rather than in distinction from, heterosexualities (Halberstam 2005:39). While hegemonic constructions of mainstream queer identity are inflected with urban-ness, so too are rural queer identities entwined with spatially constructed notions of rural-ness.

However, in order to understand how rurality inflects and challenges hegemonic, metronormative constructions of queer subjectivity, we must first conceptualize rurality as a basis for identity. Creed and Ching point out that within cultural hierarchies such as the rural-urban one, it is the marginalized group who experiences the distinction more intimately and for whom it becomes a more significant element of identity (1997:4). The deeply rooted opposition between urban and rural space has therefore become highly significant in the construction of rural identity. So in some instances, their marginality and alienation can render rural populations vulnerable to the conservative maneuvering of the far right, who exploit rural people's alienation, and "transform... their bitter desperation into [conservative] political action" (Creed and Ching 1997:29). Certainly, there are particular fears that take shape within rural white populations whereby fear of Jews, blacks, and queers can be emblematic of white rural masculinity and marginal, rural identity (Halberstam 2003:29,31). However, our limited understandings of rurality and the social construction of place has prevented us from considering how (rural) place intersects with class, race, gender, and sexuality to produce meaningful, self-consciously resistant, means of non-urban identification (Creed and Ching 1997:27). Manifested in everyday "mundane cultural activities," such as music, food, clothing, and recreation, and in tandem with more situated markers of (rural) place such as regional dialect and claims to hometown origin, the rural/urban hierarchy in general, and rurality in particular, generates not only political, but also social and personal identification (Creed and Ching 1997:3).

For instance, often "riddled with insider-outsider social structures" (Wilson 2000:208), the key to survival in many rural places revolves around social conformity and community interdepen-

dence. In this sense, the power of small-town loyalty and familial ties should not be overlooked (Wilson 2000:214). In places built upon solidarity, familiarity, and belonging, and where familiar locals are valued above any other identity claim, such ties can work to transform the “strange” or the “queer” into something, or rather, someone, who is both recognizable and familiar (Gray 2009:31,38-9). As Gray points out, many rural queers enact “politics of rural recognition” which privilege one’s credentials as “just another local” (2009:37) and denounce claims of difference. Rather than simply being “out and proud,” rural queers often express their queerness within and through the norms of their communities. In this way, the spatial construction and experience of gay or queer identity in non-urban contexts may defy or complicate dominant conceptions of the closet model (Gray 2009:37; Wilson 2000). Operating as a thread, rather than a core identity (Seidman 2004:89), queerness may be negotiated so as not to undermine other elements of one’s identity.

#### RURAL QUEERNESS AND THE POLITICS OF VISIBILITY

Like Anna Clark, who aims to “restore agency” (Clark 1996:27) to the process by which individuals’ sense of self is deliberately constructed in direct personal, material and cultural contexts, I too seek to posit rural queerness as a legitimate identity practice in its own right, and not a lesser or lacking version of mainstream, hegemonic, urban queer politics. Indeed, the modern self, Clark argues, is “a reflexive process”; something that is “worked on, invented, and reinvented” (2000:27), based upon individual experience and context. And place also matters (Clifford 2001); it enters our bodies, minds, and hearts and serves as a “way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world” (Allnut 2009: 3). We, as individuals, are always emplaced; “there is no body without its place in the world, no matter what that place is” (Allnut 2009:3). While I have thus far discussed the heteronormativ-

ity of space and the concomitant queering of it; the hegemonic urbanity embedded within narratives of queer subjectivity; and the challenges queer rurality poses to such narratives, I will now discuss the politics of visibility, and illuminate how such politics are incompatible with the structures of life, community, and identity in rural space.

While Gray's "politics of rural recognition" illustrates the challenge rural queerness can make to the hegemonic, metronormative closet model of sexual identity, it simultaneously illuminates an alternative approach to the politics of visibility. Indeed, gay and lesbian visibility politics are dependent upon the politics of identity inherent within the closet model of sexual identity. Simply put, identity politics operationalize identity as a "crucial ground of experience, a course of social knowledge, and a basis for activism" (Halperin and Traub 2009:25); they rely on collective identification as a mode of political empowerment (Halperin and Traub 2009:25). And as previously noted, the collective definition of such identification is formed by hegemonic metronormative narratives of urban queer subjectivity, which both assumes an urban location and privileges sexual identity above all other identity claims.

While the current goals and achievements of the gay pride movement, Halperin and Traub argue, revolve around acceptance and assimilation, they also include the right to be different and be legitimated based upon that difference (2009:3). Visibility politics draw upon this assertion and champion the "out-ness" and visibility of these differences as instrumental in achieving such legitimation and liberation. Rural subjectivities, however, are inherently incompatible with such visibility claims. The accomplishment of gay visibility is inherently graphed onto urban space and actually requires the rural as an "otherness" against which this achievement is measured (Halperin and Traub 2009:9). As such, the visibility politics that underlie modern, authentic gay and lesbian identities, are, as Gray points out, "tailor-made" for the "population densities; capital; and systems of gender, sexual, class, and racial privilege that converge

in cities” (2009:30). The familial reliance, local power dynamics, class relations and cultural marginalization inherent to rural areas render them ill-suited to the strategies of visibility taken up by the predominantly middle-class, urban-focused North American GLBT movement (Gray 2009:30).

It must not be assumed, however, that rural places are “endemically hostile” or somehow incapable of making room for queer differences (Gray 2009:30). Rather, in order to foster belonging and visibility in rural areas, rural queers must work through the structures of rural life, especially the dynamics of class, gender, race, and location (Gray 2009:30). The combination of physical proximity and social distance, or, indifference, within cities has been theorized as representing politics of tolerance whereby differences are by default generally accepted (Tonkiss 2005:23). The internal makeup of cities, or what urban sociologist Georg Simmel referred to as “the conditions of metropolitan life” (1950:410), revolves around the conglomeration of large numbers of people with diverse interests and perspectives. Rural areas, in contrast, are governed by sameness and familiarity, and are organized around an appreciation for solidarity, which is expressed through blending in (Gray 2009:38). Rooted particularly in family connections, familiarity and belonging are central to the structures of rural life.

Indeed, rural constructions of selfhood revolve around family, which operates as the primary category through which rural dwellers obtain and return respect (Gray 2009:37; Wilson 2000). Family connections, and community standing in general, have tangible consequences. In poverty stricken rural areas, the family unit represents the structure through which information regarding employment, housing, and many other civic services often taken for granted in cities, is exchanged (Gray 2009:39). At the same time, strangers, who are not marked by a familiar family name or local presence, are easily dismissed as intruders meddling in local affairs (Gray 2009:37). In this way, Gray argues that the invoking of familial ties can operate as a key strategy in the politics of rural queer visibility because it not only

allows rural queers to avoid marginalization and be integrated into their local communities, but it also maintains their access to the bare necessities that are needed to simply get by. While urban queer visibility politics, at their very tamest, center on the different-but-equal paradigm, rural queer visibility politics involve a delicate balance of queerness and localness, putting forth a logic of different-but-similar.

My own ethnographic research in rural Nova Scotia serves as a case in point. For instance, although Janis, a queer-identified woman in her early sixties, did not move to rural Nova Scotia until she was in her twenties, she attributes her hard work, community involvement and neighbourly connections as granting her respect and acceptance within the rural community. Rural community dynamics, in her opinion, render rural areas more, not less, capable of acceptance:

People in the country are more capable of accepting us. They are more dependent on us, and they're more aware of that . . . my involvement has protected me. . . helping people, repairing things. My neighbour was a well-respected member of the community, a very solid neighbour. . . . In the country you're protected by certain things . . . hard work is respected, and they saw that I was working hard, and was working good with people.

For Janis, the community interdependency that characterizes rural areas renders rural folk more capable of accepting difference. Echoing Gray's "politics of rural recognition" (2009), Janis's involvement within the community, via hard work, helping people, and repairing things, along with her claims to local-ness via her relationship with her neighbor, helped her earn respect, acceptance, and integration within the rest of the rural community.

In a similar vein, Chris, a gay man in his mid-thirties, teaches high school in the same town in which he grew up. He states: "99% of my students have been supportive . . . I mean, [their families] knew me since they were born. It [being gay] doesn't make me different." For Chris, the fact that his students and their families have known him all his life has earned him support and acceptance. However, for Chris, being gay "doesn't make [him] differ-

ent;” as he states, “I don’t let that aspect define me.” Like Janis, Chris draws upon his familiarity and similarity with the rural community as a source of acceptance. His claim to a gay or queer subjectivity is mediated through the structures of rural life posited by Gray (2009). Rather than drawing upon his sexual difference as a basis for identification, Chris searches for similarity; he embraces his personal and familial history with other families in the area as a source of identification and acceptance.

Betty, a lesbian in her late-fifties, who moved to rural Nova Scotia in her twenties, similarly points out:

“50% of the community knows who I am and they seem to like me and to have accepted me for what I am, it’s not a problem. But I’m not out there, I’m lesbian; I’m just me, I’m just, you know. . .’ you probably wouldn’t even know [that I was a lesbian] if I was in a crowd, you know how you can tell sometimes. But, you know, I fit right in here, no problem at all.”

For Betty, sexuality is not the definitive aspect of her identity. Rather, she notes, “I’m just me.” While half of the community is aware of and has accepted her sexuality, she is also not “out there” about it. Here it is again evident that not only are rural areas not ultimately hostile to sexual difference, but sexual difference can itself be expressed in unique ways that counter mainstream approaches to queer community and visibility. While Betty is not closeted, she is not particularly “out there” or expressive of her sexual difference. Her statement: “I’m not out there I’m lesbian; I’m just me” demonstrates that counter to mainstream visibility politics, Betty locates her sense of self by fitting in with her rural community rather than marking herself as different. This is also echoed by Bonnie, who notes:

I was never one to be you know, rash and overt about my orientation. . . . So you know, I didn’t push the envelope. . . everybody knows that I’m a lesbian. . . . I don’t shy away from being who I am but I am also not overt about my being queer. It’s within a context of neighbourliness and friendships and just kind of sharing, you know, going to community events at the local hall, and you know, being a part of the community.

For Bonnie, although she is out of the closet, and doesn't "shy away" from being herself, she is also not "overt" about being a lesbian; she doesn't "push the envelope." Rather, the importance lies in "neighbourliness," "friendships," and "community events," that is, being an active member of the rural community. Openly asserting her orientation or "difference" at every opportunity would hinder or neglect those parts of her identity. While not denying that aspect of her identity, Bonnie, like Chris and Betty, values her sexuality without building her life around it; she approaches it as an identity thread, rather than a core identity (Seidman 2004:89). Such an approach, Halberstam points out, does not necessarily signify the closet (2003:163). Rather, for some rural queers, the spatial construction and experience of GLBT or queer identity in non-urban contexts may defy or complicate dominant conceptions of the closet model and the politics of visibility (Seidman 2004:163; Wilson 2000). Contrary to embracing a politics of GLBT or queer visibility, such individuals may seek and gain acceptance of their sexuality not by asserting their difference, but by reinforcing their familiarity and commonality with the members of the rural community. That is not to say that many urban queer folk approach their sexual difference in similar ways; rather, my aim here is to draw attention to the alternative approaches to community and identity evident among queers living in rural space.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, I have demonstrated how rurality is an immensely pervasive thread of identity, which works to complicate dominant models of queer identity and politics of visibility. Examining the rural in this way not only highlights alternative constructions of queer subjectivity; it also exposes the hegemonic urbanity implicit within mainstream constructions of queer subjectivity. Indeed, queer subjectivity is itself spatialized as urban; constituted within the specific historical conditions or

the city, and mirroring processes of urbanization, queer identity is structured as a migration, with the space of the city working to authenticate modern queer subjectivity. Rural space is simultaneously constructed as the closet from which identities can emerge, and escape. In this way, queer subjectivity is governed by a symbolic urban-rural hierarchy; at the same time, rural queer subjectivities are rendered either impossible, incomplete, or inauthentic.

While the heteronormativity of everyday space, and the concomitant queering of it, have been examined within queer studies, the distinction between urban and rural space has not. Rural space, when visible, is rendered insignificant or hostile to queerness, and the politics of visibility that characterize the modern GLBT movement are inherently spatialized as urban. This hegemonic urbanism makes invisible the particularities and significance of rural space; the structures of life, community, and identity within rural spaces is incompatible with the basic tenets of mainstream visibility politics. Rather, queer visibility politics in rural areas must work through these unique structures, operating through familiarity, rather than difference. This article has demonstrated much queer studies' shortcomings in acknowledging and theorizing rural space, and has illuminated the important omissions with regard to rural queer subjectivity that exist as a result.

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