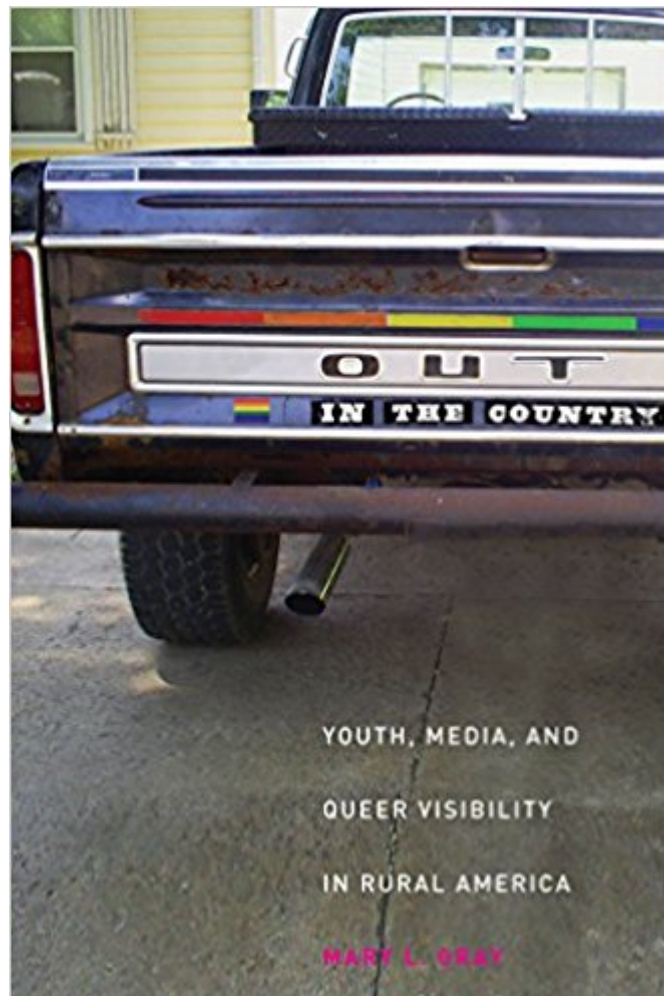




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# Out In The Country: Youth, Media, And Queer Visibility In Rural America (Intersections)



## Synopsis

Winner of the 2009 Ruth Benedict Prize for Outstanding Monograph from the Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists  
Winner of the 2010 Distinguished Book Award from the American Sociological Association, Sociology of Sexualities Section  
Winner of the 2010 Congress Inaugural Qualitative Inquiry Book Award Honorable Mention  
From Wal-Mart drag parties to renegade Homemaker's Clubs, *Out in the Country* offers an unprecedented contemporary account of the lives of today's rural queer youth. Mary L. Gray maps out the experiences of young people living in small towns across rural Kentucky and along its desolate Appalachian borders, providing a fascinating and often surprising look at the contours of gay life beyond the big city. Gray illustrates that, against a backdrop of an increasingly impoverished and privatized rural America, LGBT youth and their allies visibly—and often vibrantly—work the boundaries of the public spaces available to them, whether in their high schools, public libraries, town hall meetings, churches, or through websites. This important book shows that, in addition to the spaces of Main Street, rural LGBT youth explore and carve out online spaces to fashion their emerging queer identities. Their triumphs and travails defy clear distinctions often drawn between online and offline experiences of identity, fundamentally redefining our understanding of the term "queer visibility" and its political stakes. Gray combines ethnographic insight with incisive cultural critique, engaging with some of the biggest issues facing both queer studies and media scholarship. *Out in the Country* is a timely and groundbreaking study of sexuality and gender, new media, youth culture, and the meaning of identity and social movements in a digital age.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Gray’s ethnography allows us an in-depth look at GLBT young people in the southeastern United States. Gray’s book should be read by anyone who works with rural GLBT youth, and those interested in learning about an under-represented, but not invisible, population.”—PopMatters.com “Gray . . . challenges the urban focus of queer politics and media studies, and not solely in her choice of topic. This book has more ambitious aims than simply documenting a neglected population. Her focus on rural queer youth does this admirably, but even more impressive is how she uses her topic to unpack what Jack Halberstam calls the ‘metronormativity’ of queer scholarship and its implications for politics of visibility”—D. Travers Scott, *International Journal of Communication* “Young queer people living in rural areas face numerous challenges, to be sure. But they creatively use new media and other strategies to find one another, as Gray shows so well. *Out in the Country* challenges preconceptions about both gender and sexual nonconformity in rural America.”—Arlene Stein, author of *The Stranger Next Door* “We still know far too little about the experiences of queer youth, especially those who live in small towns and farming communities. Gray’s pioneering work will do much to cure our ignorance, as she takes us along on an engaging exploration of queer teenagers caught in the crosswinds of commercial media culture and local societal and political beliefs.”—Larry Gross, author of *Up From Invisibility: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Media in America* “*Out in the Country* succeeds insofar as it turns our attention toward the unique set of challenges faced by queer rural youth as they try to reconcile where they live with who they love.”—Daily Yonder “In this deft, smart ethnography, Gray not only brings to life the intricacies of rural queer existence, but also dislodges conventional assumptions about gay media visibility, queer identities, and the closet. As friendly, articulate, and challenging as its subjects, *Out in the Country* is a major contribution to both sexuality and media scholarship.”—Joshua Gamson, author of *The Fabulous Sylvester* “*Out in the Country* promises to excite and ignite our critical imaginations as it pushes us to reckon with the complexity of queer lives away from the urban spotlight. Gray has done a stupendous job in bringing these stories to light, and in analyzing them with such warmth, humor, and insight.”—Suzanna Danuta Walters, author of *All the Rage*

Mary L. Gray is Associate Professor in The Media School, Affiliate Faculty of Gender Studies, and an Adjunct in American Studies and Anthropology at Indiana University. She is also a Senior

Researcher at Microsoft Research New England. She is the author of *In Your Face: Stories from the Lives of Queer Youth* and *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America*.

I appreciated this read. Moving, accurate as far as I know, as a lesbian living in the upper South. It is validating to read about the struggles that others in my community have endured-it helps to know that I am not alone, and that someone is paying attention to this issue-that is huge.

As both a student of queer theory and as a queer male who lived in similar rural situations I found this book to be an enlightened changed from many of the scholarly work done on Queer youth which often seems to categorize them as victims,outsiders in their own movement and culture. This look into the culture provides both a positive representation of queer youth, as well as what it is like in coming to terms within one's own identity and sexuality and only being able to base this off of what is presented through media and through the internet, not having any physical basis or views to look towards.

*Out in the Country* is like reading a thesis. It is written for professionalswho may deal with young adults. As an actual gay person who actually lives in a rural area, it sounded like a great read. Many fascinating events and pioneering pro gay educators were mentioned in the author's research. Then the author would draw her own conclusions, which are are lengthy and repetitive causing your eyes to glaze over.I enjoyed detouring the therapist-speak to read words and deeds of actual gay folk out here in the trenches. *Out in the Country* is an important work, but aimed at professionals. Really *Out in the Country* would be wonderful if she published much more of the experiences of the youth she interviewed in their own words.And the cover is great except no one in the country has a paved driveway!

Often it feels like the national ethos is anti-rural. We urban dwellers distrust the farm, the country and the small town. It comes across in our films, television and new reports. We like rural as long as it is safe and sanitized: corn mazes and pumpkin patches and Christmas tree farms.We also assume that anyone gay will leave the country immediately. No self respecting gay man or woman could stay in a rural place where they are hated and there is no support. Homosexuality and queer gender identity have no place in the country.*Out in the Country* is an ethnography and cultural exploration of gay youth in Appalachia and rural Kentucky. It flips normal expectations about being

gay and being rural on its head. While still an academic work and a cogent exploration of the gay cultural anthropology which came before this one, the author, Mary Gray writes poetically about the struggle for equality and personal identity in the small towns of Kentucky. I enjoyed reading about a local homemakers club which endeavored to present a forum for gay youth at the local public library and a gay drag show in the aisles of Wal-mart. One chapter in the book was devoted to how gay youth use the internet to connect and to understand coming out vis a vis their own personal identity. Of course an anthropological look at rural gay youth is not going to come away with only cheerful or moral endings. Nothing in life has easy answers and no stories are necessarily ended happily or rightly. Gay people in the country do face challenges and battles to end discrimination, but they do everywhere. This book really helps to delve deeper into a place and a situation which is badly misunderstood and often stereotyped. In our age of culture wars and red states and blue states any narrative or study that helps us to think more fully about a place and a time is a welcome gift.

Much of Appalachia's static image was created by outsiders coming in and writing color pieces during the early 1900's. This is no different. A person from San Francisco comes in and looks at the hicks and how they live. His samples are biased (Berea? A Christian College? How is this representative?) They're also dated. As a gay man who grew up on a tobacco farm (I'm now 26) this is completely non representative of my experience or the experience of many I know. This stylized image fails to capture the danger and the strife faced by many of us in this region. The book should not be taken for fact but looked upon as a starting point for questions about the region that scholars should answer and study unbiased. I would write more but I'd rather not use profanity. Don't waste your money.

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