

Silenced at Home, Visible Online: A Digital Narrative Study of How LGBTQ+ Young Adults Negotiate Family Belonging, Cultural Norms, Concealment, and Online Social Support

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1. Round 1

1.1. Reviewer 1

Reviewer:

In the Methods section, the authors state, “This study employed a qualitative digital narrative design,” yet the methodological tradition is not sufficiently specified. Digital narrative inquiry may refer to participant-produced digital stories, narrative interviews conducted online, analysis of digital traces, or narrative analysis of experiences involving digital environments. In the present manuscript, participants created narrative maps, took part in online interviews, and optionally discussed digital artifacts, but they did not appear to produce complete digital stories. The authors should identify the specific narrative methodology adopted, cite its methodological foundations, and explain why the study is described as a “digital narrative study” rather than a narrative inquiry concerning digitally mediated experiences. This distinction is important for methodological transparency and for avoiding an overly broad use of the term “digital narrative.”

The section on digital artifacts states that participants could discuss anonymized screenshots, messages, memes, posts, and profile descriptions. However, the manuscript does not report how many participants provided or described artifacts, how many artifacts were retained, or whether these materials contributed substantively to the analysis. The authors should provide an aggregate description of artifact use and clarify the ethical distinction between participant-created content and third-party

material. They should also explain how consent, copyright, and the privacy of individuals appearing in messages or screenshots were managed, particularly when de-identification could not fully eliminate deductive disclosure within small online communities.

The Data Analysis section describes “an integrated narrative and reflexive thematic approach,” but the procedures currently place substantially greater emphasis on coding and thematic aggregation than on established narrative analysis. The authors should identify which dimensions of narrative were examined, such as temporality, plot, turning points, positioning, audience, performativity, coherence, or counter-narratives. The statement that researchers examined “how participants structured their experiences over time” is promising, but examples are needed to show how this analysis differed from ordinary thematic coding. The authors should also explain how the narrative case summaries informed the final themes and configurations, rather than functioning merely as preparatory descriptions.

Response: Revised and uploaded the new document.

1.2. Reviewer 2

Reviewer:

The paragraph describing the epistemological orientation states that the study was “informed by a constructivist epistemological orientation” and also guided by intersectionality. However, the manuscript does not explain how these frameworks shaped interviewing, coding, interpretation, or the representation of participant accounts. The authors should demonstrate how constructivism influenced the treatment of narratives as co-produced accounts and how intersectionality was applied analytically beyond recruiting a diverse sample. For example, the manuscript should clarify whether intersections of race, migration, religion, disability, gender identity, and socioeconomic dependence were coded systematically, examined through within-case analysis, or incorporated only during thematic interpretation.

The sample consists of exactly 24 participants, and the authors state that recruitment ended when “the dataset contained sufficient depth and diversity.” This explanation requires greater methodological precision. The use of “information power” and “narrative sufficiency” is appropriate, but the manuscript should describe the concrete indicators used to determine that additional recruitment was no longer necessary. The authors should report whether recruitment and analysis occurred concurrently, whether new interviews continued to produce new narrative configurations or subthemes, and whether the decision to stop at 24 was influenced by practical constraints. Without such detail, the justification risks appearing retrospective and may be interpreted as an unsupported assertion of saturation.

The eligibility criteria require participants to have “used at least one online platform or digitally mediated community for identity expression, information seeking, social connection, emotional support, or communication with other LGBTQ+ individuals.” This criterion is extremely broad and may have produced substantial heterogeneity in digital engagement. A participant who passively viewed public content once would differ considerably from one who maintained long-term relationships in private online communities. The authors should specify whether minimum duration, frequency, or intensity of digital participation was required and report how the analysis accounted for variation between observational use, anonymous participation, public posting, dating applications, gaming communities, and sustained peer-support relationships.

The recruitment strategy relied on LGBTQ+ organizations, educational institutions, community services, and social media networks. This approach likely favored participants who were already connected to affirming resources, digitally literate, and willing to identify themselves to researchers. The Methods should more directly acknowledge this sampling bias and explain what steps were taken to recruit highly concealed individuals, rural participants, young adults outside postsecondary institutions, and those with limited community involvement. The manuscript should also report the number of individuals screened, the number excluded or withdrawn, and the principal reasons for nonparticipation, as these details would help readers evaluate selection processes and the final sample’s representativeness within the intended qualitative scope.

The participant characteristics paragraph provides considerable demographic detail, but some categories appear analytically simplified. The sentence “Based on participants’ primary self-descriptions, seven identified as bisexual, five as gay, four as lesbian, four as pansexual, three as queer, and one as questioning” treats sexual orientation categories as mutually exclusive,

while the gender identity categories are presented separately. The authors should explain how participants with multiple or fluid labels were classified and why “primary self-description” was used. Similar clarification is needed for racial and ethnocultural identities, particularly the grouping of “Middle Eastern or North African,” “East or Southeast Asian,” and “White or European ancestry,” which may conceal meaningful differences relevant to cultural norms and family belonging.

The manuscript reports that interviews lasted “approximately 75 to 110 minutes,” which is unusually long and potentially emotionally demanding given the sensitive subject matter. The authors should explain how participant fatigue and distress were monitored, whether breaks were routinely offered, and whether follow-up interviews were considered as an alternative to a single prolonged session. The ethical procedures should also specify whether the interviewer had training in trauma-informed interviewing and how the research team responded when participants disclosed family violence, housing insecurity, suicidality, coercive control, or imminent risk. Providing a resource list alone may be insufficient when interviews involve potentially acute safety concerns.

The participant-generated digital narrative map is a potentially valuable contribution, but its methodological role requires clearer explanation. The manuscript states that participants created “between four and eight important moments,” yet it is unclear whether the maps were formally analyzed, used only as interview prompts, or incorporated into the narrative case summaries. The authors should report how many participants completed the map, what formats were used, whether the maps were coded, and how discrepancies between maps and interview accounts were handled. If the maps contributed to the findings, the analytic process should be described explicitly; if they served only as elicitation devices, the manuscript should avoid implying that they constituted an independent data source.

Response: Revised and uploaded the new document.

2. Revised

Editor’s decision: Accepted.

Editor in Chief’s decision: Accepted.