



Dr. Lynette Kvasny

Texas A&M University

Friday, November 6, 2:30 PM—4:00  
PM  
ACAD 326

### An African American Weblog Community's Reading of AIDS in Black America

**Abstract:** For online African Americans, blogs have emerged as an important medium for social support and communication by and for Black people. In this talk, I will present an interpretive study that examines how ethnic identity is performed as an African American blog community converses about HIV/AIDS. The conversation raises several areas of concern including the inaction of politicians and influential Black religious leaders, damaging racial stereotypes disseminated by the media, the negative influence of hip-hop culture on gender relations, and the risky sexual behaviors that put individuals at higher risk for contracting HIV. When discussing these topics, community members employ distinct cultural styles such as African American vernacular, storytelling, kinesics, as well as references to prominent Black people, institutions, and practices.

While some fear that social division breaks down the idealized notion of a digital public sphere (boyd, 2009; Hargittai, 2009), the findings in this study suggest that social division online has positive qualities for groups experiencing stigmatization in offline social life. Blogs engender self-affirmation as African Americans assert their self worth and confront damaging attributions imposed by others. Blogs also add to the vibrancy of social life by providing ethnic public spheres where people can discuss topics of interest from a Black perspective.

Lynette Kvasny is Associate Professor in the College of Information Sciences and Technology at the Pennsylvania State University. Her research explores the ways in which race, gender and class identities shape and are shaped by the use of information and communication technologies.