

Understanding the Well-Being of LGBTQI+ Populations

COMMUNITY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Over the past decade, there have been remarkable changes in the social, political, and legal status of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and other sexual and gender diverse (LGBTQI+) populations. In 2020, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine convened an expert committee to explore what is currently known about LGBTQI+ populations. The resulting report, *Understanding the Well-Being of LGBTQI+ Populations*, highlights the need for attention to the social and structural inequities that drive disparities affecting sexual and gender diverse populations and argues for new research on the full range of sexual and gender diversity, especially among LGBTQI+ people at the intersections of multiple marginalized identities. Community organizations and the spaces they provide have long been an important way to mobilize groups of people with disparate experiences but common interests. This brief discusses definitions of LGBTQI+ communities and the ways in which these communities claim, integrate, and negotiate both physical and social spaces, including how safe spaces are essential tools for community building and mobilization. Citations and further information can be found in Chapter 7 of the report.

LGBTQI+ Communities and Spaces

LGBTQI+ communities are made up of people from a variety of racial and ethnic, socioeconomic, cultural, political, regional, age, and ability groups. In comparison to non-LGBTQI+ people, LGBTQI+ people experience more economic and social instability, including homelessness, under- and unemployment, violence, and interpersonal and structural discrimination. Community has thus become an important provider of emotional, social, moral, and political support for LGBTQI+ people. Community is both a site and a source of struggle, hierarchy, and liberation for LGBTQI+ people; it is also a source of belonging, value, affirmation, and collectivity, all of which are values and feelings associated with well-being. Community connectedness has also been shown to help LGBTQI+ people maintain resilience and address health disparities by facilitating the exchange of information, support, and resources.

Access to safe spaces is essential for building community. For LGBTQI+ people, access to affirming spaces facilitates community engagement, which promotes feelings of recognition, inclusion, connectedness, and safety that are often otherwise denied to them. These spaces can range from physical gathering places and social convenings in specific locations to an array of online resources. In particular, online communities are often created out of the need for information, connection, and support among less visible and marginalized LGBTQI+ groups. LGBTQI+ people have also sought to carve out safe spaces in religious, educational, and health institutions, and the past several years have seen a burgeoning of LGBTQI+-affirming churches and denominations and noninstitutional and Indigenous spiritual practices, as well as gender-sexuality alliances at schools, and community-based LGBTQI+ medical and health centers.

Because access to space is linked to participation in public culture, which is also influenced by the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and social class, working class and poor LGBTQI+ people of color do not always have access to the same spaces as do LGBTQI+ people of other races and classes. Thus, not all LGBTQI+ people have equitable access to affirming and safe physical, virtual, and social spaces. For example, festivals and group celebrations are an important part of LGBTQ+ culture, and LGBTQ+ pride celebrations in major cities attract thousands of attendees. Many remain self-segregated, however, leaving ethnically diverse LGBTQ+ people to respond by protesting or creating their own pride events to serve as venues for community building and engagement.

Civic and Political Involvement

There are many ways in which people may engage in formal political institutions, including donating money to campaigns, electioneering for candidates or issues, and attending rallies or protests. The civic and political engagement of LGBTQI+ people cuts across all of these dimensions, and studies show that lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults tend to be more civically and politically engaged than heterosexual adults: they engage government officials, donate to and volunteer in campaigns, and attend protests and rallies at higher rates than non-LGB people. Similarly, transgender people are registered to vote at higher rates than the cisgender population. Connectedness to other LGBTQI+ people is a strong predictor of sociopolitical involvement, and high levels of community mobilization and sociopolitical involvement have been key to advances in the struggle for equality, inclusion, and social justice for LGBTQI+ populations.

It should be noted that mainstream political organizations tend to prioritize policy and legal changes on topics that may not address the needs of vulnerable groups such as LGBTQI+ people, though this has been changing to be more inclusive in recent years. This inclusiveness advances policy and broadens the availability of services to promote the well-being of LGBTQI+ people, and it provides agency and political power to LGBTQI+ communities and organizations.



Key Research Areas

- Development and evaluation of interventions to ensure equitable access to affirming and safe physical, virtual, and social spaces for sexual and gender diverse people, particularly Black, Indigenous, and other LGBTQI+ people of color
 - The relationship between LGBTQI+ community engagement and sociopolitical involvement
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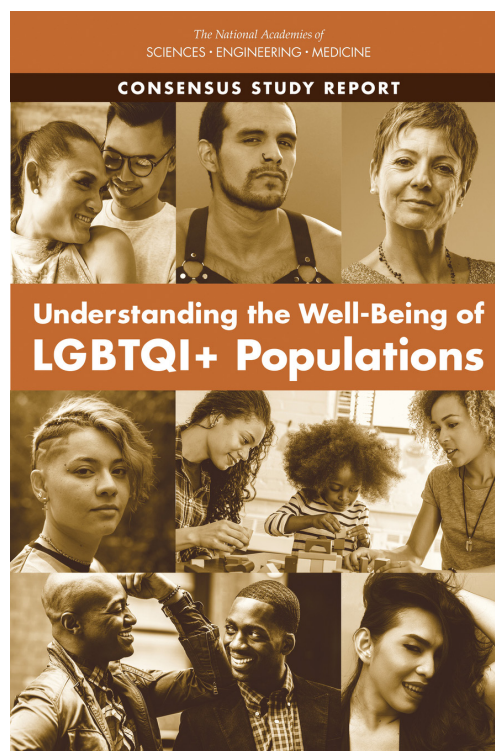
Resources

Read the report highlights and the full report online, download a free PDF, or order the paperback publication today.

[*Understanding the Well-Being of LGBTQI+ Populations*](#) (2020)

View the project's interactive [resource](#), highlighting the key findings of the report.

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