

LGBTQ JOY: THE INFLUENCE OF COMMUNITY CONTEXT

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Abstract: Previous literature studying LGBTQ+ individuals and community involvement has asserted that LGBTQ+ positive community support results in the improved mental well-being of LGBTQ+ youth and adults (Wright, Wachs, and Gamez-Guadix 2022) and less chance of risk factors (Eisenberg et al. 2020; Elmer, Van Tilburg, and Fokkema 2022; Fish et al. 2019; Watson et al. 2020). The purpose of the current study is to investigate what community resources facilitate positive identity and joy. To address these questions, student researchers conducted 8 in-depth interviews, which lasted approximately one hour and included questions about the participants' identities, relationships with community, family, and school, and experiences of joy. We used grounded theory analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to analyze data from the interviews. Preliminary findings suggest that connecting to the LGBTQ+ community fostered positive identity development and a sense of belonging in participants. Conversely, leaving hostile religious communities also resulted in positive identity development and self-acceptance. These results demonstrate that community spaces that affirm and connect LGBTQ+ individuals encourage identity exploration, resulting in a sense of self-confidence and belonging. However, the negative self-perception experienced within hostile community spaces 19 that reject LGBTQ+ identities may translate into defiance and eventual self-acceptance, resulting in a sense of relief once the individual leaves the community setting.

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