

'Gayborhoods' still home to subtle discrimination

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Despite claiming to support gay rights, many straight people who live in traditionally gay neighbourhoods still practice subtle forms of discrimination when interacting with their gay and lesbian neighbours.

That's the key finding of new University of British Columbia sociology research published today in the journal *City and Community*.

The study found that straight people living in "gaybourhoods" say they support [gay rights](#) in theory, but many interact with their gay and lesbian neighbours on the street in ways that contradict those sentiments.

"There is a mistaken belief that marriage equality means the struggle for gay rights is over," said Amin Ghaziani, the study's senior author and associate professor of sociology at UBC. "But it is far from over. Prejudice and [discrimination](#) still exist— it's just more subtle and difficult to detect."

For the study, the researchers interviewed 53 straight people who live in two Chicago gaybourhoods, Boystown and Andersonville.

They found the majority of residents said they supported gay people. However, the researchers found their progressive attitudes were misaligned with their actions. While many residents said they don't care if people are gay or straight, some indicated that they don't like gay people who are "in your face."

When asked about resistance from LGBTQ communities to the widespread trend of straight people moving into gaybourhoods, some of the people interviewed responded with accusations of reverse discrimination and described gay people who challenged them as "segregationist" and "hetero-phobic."

Some said they believed they should have open access to cultural gay spaces, and were surprised that they felt "unwelcome" there.

"If a group of straight women hosted a bachelorette party in a gay bar, for example, they were surprised that they felt 'unwelcome,'" said Ghaziani. "That feeling of surprise, however, exemplifies a misguided belief that gay districts are trendy commodities when they are actually safe spaces for sexual minorities."

When the researchers asked residents if they had done anything to show their support of gay rights, such as marching in the pride parade, donating to an LGBTQ organization, or writing a letter in support of marriage equality to a politician, the majority said they had not.

Many also expected their gay and lesbian neighbours to be happy and welcoming of straight people moving into gaybourhoods, expressing sentiments like, "you wanted equality— this is what equality looks like."

Ghaziani said this argument exemplifies the fundamental misunderstanding of the inequality and discrimination that creates the need for gaybourhoods in the first place.

"The people we interviewed say their desire is for everyone to 'just get along,' but that desire implies that gaybourhoods are utopias where everyone can live, rather than places where minorities can find relief from discrimination and social isolation," he said.

With gay pride celebrations fast approaching around the world, Adriana Brodyn, the study's lead author and a PhD student in the UBC department of sociology, said it is important to pause and reflect on the state of LGBTQ [equality](#).

"I hope that our research motivates people against becoming politically complacent or apathetic," she said. "If we do not motivate ourselves to be aware of this subtle form of prejudice, then it will just continue to perpetuate."

More information: Adriana Brodyn et al, Performative Progressiveness: Accounting for New Forms of Inequality in the Gayborhood, *City & Community* (2018). [DOI: 10.1111/cico.12298](https://doi.org/10.1111/cico.12298)

Provided by University of British Columbia

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