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2022

Understanding the Intersections of the LGBTQ+ Community & Climate Change

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UNDERSTANDING THE INTERSECTIONS OF THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY & CLIMATE CHANGE

San Diego Regional Climate Collaborative

INTERSECTIONS OF LGBTQ+ & CLIMATE CHANGE

Pride Month is a special occasion for folks in the LGBTQ+ community to celebrate their identities. However, its foundations were not as joyous as today's pride parades and festivities. Pride was spurred by social dissent to counter the erasure of the LGBTQ+ community following the 1969 Stonewall Uprising. Pride recognizes the impact that LGBTQ+ individuals have had on history and our communities. Much like Earth Day, Pride serves as a reminder that the fight for justice and equity is never over, and social dissent still persists. As Pride Month comes to a close, we want to acknowledge the critical intersections of the LGBTQ+ community and climate change.

Throughout the years, there has been increased visibility and support for the LGBTQ+ community in mainstream media and culture. However, due to long-lasting discrimination and oppression, little is known about the LGBTQ+ community and its relationship to the environment, climate justice and environmental science.

In order to ensure we are enabling communities to be resilient to the impacts of climate change, it is critical we understand historic inequities and existing disparities. In this blog, we will explore these LGBTQ+ community relationships as they relate to environmental justice, relationships and access to the outdoors, and community representation in the environmental science field.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Oftentimes, climate justice intersections are framed primarily around class and race; however, other identities such as sexual orientation and gender identity can greatly impact one's lived experience, and consequently, influence one's vulnerability to climate impacts. The health and equity consequences of climate change intersecting with LGBTQ+ identities is

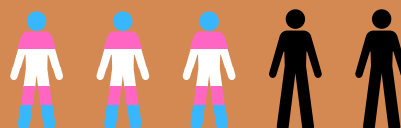
vastly understudied. According to the Center of American Progress, more than 1 in 3 LGBTQ+ Americans faced discrimination of some kind during 2020, including more than 3 in 5 transgender Americans. This discrimination is seen most starkly in their access to employment, housing, and health care, but also their mental health and safety.¹ Inaccessible housing, healthcare, and employment access amplify negative environmental impacts on the LGBTQ+ community.

Historically, LGBTQ+ identifying individuals were barred access from safe and secure housing. For example, the FHA prioritized housing loans to those in a "fit" marriage, which was predominantly reserved for heterosexual couples – this hindered many LGBTQ+ individuals who chose to be unmarried or did not have access to legalized marriage to secure loans for housing.² This practice is similar in its scope and lasting impact to redlining. Inability of LGBTQ+ communities to obtain wealth and equity through housing created a clear pathway for these communities to reside in low-income, redlined areas.

Redlined communities that are already disproportionately burdened with environmental degradation, such as pollution exposure, and social factors, such as housing and food insecurity, will see these burdens exacerbated by climate change impacts.



1 of 3 LGBTQ+ Americans faced discrimination of some kind in 2020



3 in 5 transgender Americans faced discrimination of some kind in 2020

One example is that neighborhoods that are predominantly LGBTQ+ identifying experience greater air pollution;³ additionally, LGBTQ+ identifying individuals have a higher risk of respiratory illness and cancer due to higher rates of smoking, as well as in such cases the result of performing gender affirming practices such as chest binding.⁴ As air quality impacts become more intense with increased impacts of climate change, such as wildfire smoke and carbon emissions, research shows that LGBTQ+ individuals will disproportionately bare the impact of these consequences.

Disparities of access to green and outdoor space is strongly correlated with historical practices of redlining and subsequent impacts on community infrastructure. These impacts increase a community's exposure to extreme heat and flood risk - two climate change vulnerabilities that continue to intensify. Lack of access to green space is an existing structural inequity as it related to the LGBTQ+ community since most LGBTQ+ safe queer spaces are restricted to urban areas. Outdoor spaces that have reduced air pollution are also less frequented by the LGBTQ+ community, both due to access and safety. Outdoor spaces have been predominantly heterosexual and cisgender. The social exclusion and disproportionate representation of LGBTQ+ folks in outdoor spaces has consequently made those who are LGBTQ+ identifying feel unsafe and unwelcomed in the outdoors due to the possibility of harassment.

REPRESENTATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES & STEM

in STEM fields, such as environmental sciences, LGBTQ+ representation remains sparse. At a university level, LGBTQ+ identifying STEM students are 7% less likely to be retained in STEM than in non-STEM fields.⁵ Access to entry for many careers in environmental science, as well as related green workforce sectors, is challenging and result in many marginalized individuals including the LGBTQ+ community being excluded from these fields.

Because LGBTQ+ representation in these disciplines is low, this may continue a cycle and discourage LGBTQ+ young professionals from pursuing a career in these fields. Research has demonstrated that LGBTQ+ folks experience devalued respect, discrimination in the workplace, and access to mentors with similar life experiences who help young professionals navigate these disciplines.⁶ Hostile work environments and lack of existing LGBTQ+ community representation may drive other LGBTQ+ professionals to pursue careers that have greater representation. LGBTQ+ individuals provide valuable insight based on their lived experiences surrounding climate change and environmental justice; thus, it is important to continue diversifying this discipline moving forward.

GET ENGAGED

- **Queering the Path:** Led by queer and trans people of color, Queering the Path aims to create a safe, inclusive, and affirming space for LGBTQ+ folks in the outdoors.
- **OUT for Sustainability:** A national organization that advocates for climate resilience and environmental justice led by and for LGBTQ+ communities. O4S provides resources and trainings through their platform to educate the community on how to prepare for and combat climate hazards.
- **Pattie Gonia:** "environmentalist, drag queen, and full-time homosexual," Pattie Gonia uses social media and drag to provide a fresh and fun perspective on environmentalism, and encourages LGBTQ+ individuals to go outdoors as their authentic selves. This fall, they are providing a fully-funded two-week backpacking trip for 10 young LGBTQ+ adults.

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The San Diego Regional Climate Collaborative was established in 2011 as a network for public agencies to advance climate change solutions and is currently housed at The Nonprofit Institute at the University of San Diego.