HOW DISTINCT IS GAY NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGE? PATTERNS AND VARIATION IN GAYBORHOOD TRAJECTORIES


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This paper contests prevalent assumptions about recent change in gay neighborhoods. Rising acceptance of LGBTQ people in US society may have led to widespread assimilation, while simultaneously opening up gay neighborhoods to increased gentrification. Alternatively, some gay neighborhoods may have been coincidentally undermined by local urban processes. Either way, known cultural and institutional changes should be linked to observable material changes in gay neighborhoods. I directly examine neighborhood-level demographic and economic change across a profile of seven general characteristics, in 28 gay neighborhoods across 23 cities. I contextualize the nature and extent of this change by comparing gay neighborhoods to other similar neighborhoods, and to their cities overall. This study identifies gay neighborhoods using a novel digital listing of gay bars, and it uses 2006-2015 American Community Survey estimates for data on change over time. I find that gay neighborhoods share a common profile: they are relatively more educated, more male, whiter, and wealthier than average, while having fewer different-sex married-couple households. Instead of evidence for assimilation, I find that gay neighborhoods continue to be distinct in terms of gender and household type. I find only limited evidence in favor of increasing economic status, in the form of increased education levels. I conclude that observed gay neighborhood change is more local than widespread, and that LGBTQ acceptance has not brought about the integration or erosion of gay neighborhoods. This case contributes to the more general study of urban minority enclaves, providing an example for marginalized and minority groups seeking to understand change in their communities in light of historical shifts.

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