
This is the **accepted version** of the journal article:

Piqueras Leza, Roberte Davida; Valdivia, Paloma. «Creating safe spaces with LGBTI Youth: A Participatory Exploration of Social Capital Dynamics». *Social sciences & humanities open*, 2025

This version is available at <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/335631>

under the terms of the  ^{IN}
COPYRIGHT license.

Creating Safe Spaces with LGBTI Youth: A Participatory Exploration of Social Capital Dynamics

Roberte Piqueras-Leza & Paloma Valdiviza-Vizarreta

Department of Theories of Education and Social Pedagogy, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Bellaterra, Spain

Acknowledgements

We extend our deepest gratitude to the LGBTI youth group and their families, whose participation and insights were invaluable to this study. We are also profoundly grateful to the NGO Actuavallès for their unwavering support and collaboration throughout the research process. Additionally, we thank the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona for providing the essential equipment and resources that enabled the successful completion of this project.

This work would not have been possible without the collective effort, guidance, and encouragement of these individuals and institutions. All contributors named here have provided substantial support, but do not meet the criteria for authorship. We confirm that we have obtained their consent to acknowledge their contributions in this manuscript.

Declaration of Interest statement

This work was supported by the “Agencia de Gestión de Ayudas Universitarias y de Investigación” under Grant 2023 DI 00087. The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

This communication is part of the R&D&I Project: “Learning through the social participation of young people. Its contribution to youth empowerment in youth trajectories” (4HEBE), funded by the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities. Reference: PID2023-147369OB-10

Roberte Piqueras-Leza

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Relational spaces often perpetuate heteronormative frameworks, presenting heterosexuality as the dominant norm, which fosters LGBTIphobia (LeFrançois, B. A., 2013). LGBTI youth consequently face internalized stigma, rejection fears, and identity concealment pressures, contributing to depression, anxiety, social isolation, and suicidal behavior (Nordmarken, S., 2023; Dürrbaum & Sattler, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these vulnerabilities by intensifying social isolation, limiting access to safe spaces, and increasing exposure to unsupportive or hostile home environments (Platero & López-Sáez, 2021). While digital platforms provided connection opportunities, challenges such as cyberbullying, privacy issues, and algorithmic exclusion persisted (Langarita, Trull-Oliva, Villá & Montserrat, 2023).

In Spain, the 2023 Law for Real and Effective Equality of Trans People and Guarantee of LGBTI Rights marks a major step toward addressing systemic discrimination. This law ensures rights in education, healthcare, and employment, bans conversions therapies, and mandates diversity training and inclusion measures. However, implementation challenges arise from Spain's decentralized political structure and resistance from culturally conservative sectors (Langarita et al., 2023; López-Sáez et al., 2023; Teasley, C., 2004). This study brings to policy measures how to enhance safe space creation and participation for LGBTI youth.

1.2. Problem Statement

A recent WHO study involving 227.441 students across 45 countries reported that 10% experienced and 6% perpetrated bullying multiple times within two months (Inchley et al., 2020). In Spain, 32,4% of LGBTI individuals aged 18-24 reported harassment in the last five years, with nearly 30% of 2023 complaints in Catalonia filed by minors (FELGTBI+, 2023; Government of Catalonia, 2023). Historically, LGBTI+ population in Spain has faced challenged, rooted in Franco's dictatorship (1954-1978) criminalizing homosexuality, leaving lingering societal stigmas such as the pathologization of trans identities (Martinez & Dodge, 2010; Vale, 2019).

Catalonia's progressive policies, such as the 2014 Law 11/2014, aim to eradicate discrimination via measures like diversity training and inclusive school practices. Sabadell, Catalonia's fifth-largest city, encapsulates the tension between progressive strides and enduring conservatism. It is also a hub for trans-exclusionary radical feminism (TERF), which weaponizes feminist rhetoric to marginalize trans youth, exacerbating barriers to safe spaces (Carrera-Fernández & DePalma, 2020; Pearce, Erikainen & Vincent, 2020). The rise of far-right populist movements across Europe has similarly fostered anti-LGBTI rethoric, stigmatizing LGBTI communities and opposing inclusion efforts (Pearce et al., 2020; Ammaturo, 2015).

Safe spaces for LGBTI individuals are vital as they foster social capital and mutual support, though reliance on bonding capital, strong ties within homogeneous groups, can limit broader societal advocacy (Gandy, 2015; Nugent & Deacon, 2022). Addressing systemic barriers requires integrating bridging and linking capital to foster resilience and transformation (Vaccaro, August & Kennedy, 2012; Úcar, 2015).

This study examines an innovative non-formal educational program in which LGBTI youth co-create “safe spaces” within their communities using participatory methods like photovoice and geolocation. It investigates how social capital and legislative frameworks interact to foster resilience, belonging, and agency, offering insights into enhancing youth participation in safer spaces amidst Spain's evolving policies.

1.3. Objectives

This study explores how LGBTI youth in Sabadell create and maintain safe spaces, examining the interplay of participatory methods and social capital within evolving legal frameworks and cultural challenges.

1. How do LGBTI youth participating in Actuavallès¹ NGO create and conceptualize safe spaces?
2. What is the role of social capital in creating and maintaining their safe spaces?

1.4. Literature Review

LGBTIphobic harassment encompasses discriminatory practices targeting sexual orientation, gender identity, expression, or characteristics, rooted in cisheteronormative norms. Such behaviors foster exclusion and harm well-being in institutional settings, but transformative policies can counteract these dynamics and promote safe spaces (Gandy, 2015; Cserni & Talmud, 2015).

1.4.1. Origins, Controversies, Evolution and Characteristics of Safe Spaces

The concept of “safe space” emerged during the civil rights and feminist movements of the 60s-70s as environments where discriminated groups could organize without fear (Iversen, 2019). Adopted by the LGBTI community, these spaces became vital for activism and identity formation, providing refuge from societal judgment and fostering self-exploration and community-building (Vaccaro et al., 2012; Auestad, 2018). For LGBTI youth, such spaces mitigate systemic stigmatization, offering affirmation and growth opportunities (Flensner & Von der Lippe, 2019).

Critiques argue safe spaces may reinforce segregation or limit broader societal engagement. Concepts like “brave spaces” emphasize confronting

¹ <https://actuavalles.org/>

discomfort to foster inclusivity (Ahmed, 2006; Arao & Clemens, 2013). Otherwise, digital safe spaces present dualities: while they provide peer networks and resources, they also pose risks like cyberbullying (Brownlie, 2018).

Youth actively co-create safe environments through situated practices (Djohari, Pyindiah & Arnone, 2018). The concept evolves across physical, digital, and symbolic dimensions, with 12 characteristics emerging from this literature review as a foundation for critical analysis and future research.

1. **Mitigating Cultural Violence.** Safe Spaces must actively reduce cultural violence, addressing intersecting identities such as race, gender, and sexual orientation. These spaces challenge the dominance of cultural norms that suppress marginalized voices, enabling individuals to express their identities authentically (Collins & Bilge, 2020). However, as we argued previously, digital safe spaces present a duality: while fostering resistance, they can also replicate offline hierarchies and biases that perpetuate marginalization (Sepulveda-Parrini, Valdivia-Vizarreta & Pineda-Herrero, 2024).
2. **Prejudice-Free Environment.** A hallmark of safe spaces is their commitment to freedom from prejudice, providing an environment where individuals can present themselves openly and speak without fear of censorship or ridicule (Vaccaro et al., 2012).
3. **Spaces for Resistance and Debate.** Safe spaces are not merely zones of comfort; they are also arenas for critical resistance and debate. These environments foster the generation of new identities and knowledge while advocating for social transformation (Pérez, 2020).
4. **Mutual Respect and Expression.** This is foundational to safe spaces, facilitating open exchanges of thoughts and emotions without fear of reprisal (Motos-Teruel, 2018).
5. **Emotional Safety and Affect.** Safe spaces evoke this climate, where instinctive reactions of care and openness flourish. Educational spaces, in particular, balance “content and affect” to create meaningful learning experiences (Weems, 2019). Classrooms, as contested spaces, reflect historical, cultural, and political practices that shape educational engagement (Kambunga, Smith, Winschiers-Theophilus & Otto, 2023).
6. **Connection and Reflection.** Safe spaces enable individuals to connect with others experiencing similar challenges, facilitating shared reflections on subjective experiences. These dynamics foster a sense of community and understanding (Wernick, Kulick & Woodford, 2014).
7. **Protection and Care.** Promoting a sense of collective care, safe spaces emphasize both physical and virtual protection, where individuals actively support one another (Brownlie, 2018).
8. **Nonviolent Communication and Dialogue.** Equipping young people with conflict resolution skills is integral to the ethos of safe spaces. These environments prioritize freedom, creativity, and joy while encouraging

dialogue between differing perspectives (Huang, 2015; Cortez & Preiss, 2013).

9. **Explicit Rules and Emotional Security.** Safe spaces are underpinned by explicit rules that foster emotional security and respectful engagement. These structures create opportunities for empathetic discussions and balanced interactions between safety and openness (Flensner & Von der Lippe, 2019; Palfrey, 2017).
10. **Participatory Learning and Movement.** Youth participation in safe spaces fosters deliberation on challenging topics, building confidence and resilience through active engagement (Cortez & Preiss, 2013). Safe spaces are dynamic, requiring constant negotiation between safety and insecurity, individuality and collectivity, and agreement and disagreement (Hunter, 2008).
11. **Community participation and Empowerment.** This is fundamental in fostering connections that create a sense of belonging and commitment to collective development (Nugent & Deacon, 2022). Empowerment within safe spaces is rooted in self-recognition as agents of change, amplifying awareness of rights and building resilience against systemic risks (Bacqué & Biewener, 2013; Johns, Beltran, Armstrong, Jayne & Barrios, 2018). Community programs often yield tangible benefits, including improved academic performance, reduced substance use, and better mental health outcomes (Fish, Moody, Grossman & Russell, 2019).
12. **Horizontal Community Structures.** Safe spaces thrive on horizontal community structures that emphasize mutual respect, belonging, and positive social norms. These structures foster connections with minimal hierarchy, enabling inclusive and equitable participation (London, Pastor, Servon, Rosner & Wallace, 2010; Bacqué & Biewener, 2013).

These tensions call for ongoing dialogue and innovation to keep safe spaces dynamic and responsive to LGBTI communities' evolving needs. This exploration lays the groundwork for examining the role of social capital in how LGBTI youth create and maintain safe spaces. By analyzing bonding, bridging, and linking social capital, the next section explores how these networks foster resilience, empowerment, and societal impact.

1.4.2. Social Capital Dynamics Creating and Maintaining Safe Spaces

Social capital is conceptualized as a dynamic and cyclical process that evolves within communities, embedded in the relationships between individuals and groups, which are in a continuous state of transformation (Úcar, 2015). In the context of LGBTI youth, social capital is a crucial tool to address the challenges of exclusion and promote their social integration. According to Nugent and Deacon (2022), social capital represents a strength in building a safe LGBTI community and has proven to be a valuable resource for LGBTI youth to face challenges and achieve successful social integration (Cserni et al., 2015). In this study, social capital is structured in three forms: bonding, bridging and linking (Putman, Simon & Schuster, 2000;

Woolcock, 2001), and its impact on the experiences of LGBTI youth and its relationship to the characteristics of safe spaces are analyzed.

1.4.2.1. Bonding Social Capital: Strong Ties, Self-Acceptance and Sense of Belonging

Bonding social capital refers to strong ties within a homogenous group, such as family and close friends. Family support is crucial for self-acceptance in young people (Kwon, 2013), buffering the negative impact of perceived rejection, as well as lower rates of depression, substance abuse and suicidal thoughts (Snapp, Watson, Russell, Diaz & Ryan, 2015). Close friends also play a relevant role in the well-being of LGBTI youth providing a safe space where they can be open about their identity without fear of rejection. In addition, LGBTI young people also often form what are known as “chosen families”, in which they find a sense of belonging and support. These spaces function as intimate communities where they form emotional bonds and receive validation of their identity (Valentine & Skelton, 2003). The formation of these networks also highlights the importance of having at least one trusted adult who acts as a confidant and advocate for LGBTI youth (Vincent, 2019). Some young people also report having trusted heterosexual friends who play a similar role (Higa, Hoppe, Lindhorst, Mincer, Beadnell, Morrison, Wells, Todd & Mountz, 2014).

In the context of LGBTI youth, these close relationships provide emotional resources, practical support and assistance in difficult situations, reducing the risk of violence and discrimination (Stengel, 2010; Weems, 2019). In addition, strong ties foster self-acceptance and emotional security, which is crucial for the resilience of LGBTI youth. Feeling part of a network, as an extension of the fundamental human need to belong, is linked to lower levels of stress and a greater ability to cope with discrimination (Frost & Meyer, 2012). However, when bonding ties are limited only to members of the LGBTI community, access to broader networks and different resources is restricted, limiting employment, educational and social opportunities (Stengel, 2010; Weems, 2019). Lack of family support can also hinder the building of this type of capital for some young people, particularly those who are rejected by their relatives. These young people find themselves in an extremely vulnerable situation where support from other adults acting as parental figures becomes critical (Kwon, 2013; Brownlie, 2018).

1.4.2.2. Bridging Social Capital: Expanding Opportunities and Diverse Networks

Bridging social capital refers to the connection between different groups and facilitates the exchange of ideas and resources between diverse communities. For LGBTI youth, this type of social capital enables bridging with groups outside their immediate circle, facilitating inclusion and expanding access to new opportunities, which fosters trust and reciprocity among members with similar backgrounds (Kwon, 2013). Bridging links to people from diverse social groups, facilitating the exchange of ideas and resources between different communities. Relationships and community

ties can be used to access resources and services that increase LGBTI people's safety (Brownlie, 2018).

Social capital enhances a sense of community, collective efficacy, community capacity and skills (Sapag and Kawachi, 2007), through the creation of networks that strengthen community ties, establish an atmosphere of trust and mutual support (Vaccaro et al., 2012) and contribute to strengthening LGBTI inclusion, diversity and representation in the community. Through the formation of support and solidarity networks, including digital social networks (Cserni et al., 2015), LGBTI people could be provided with protection and assistance.

These links also provide emotional resources, information, counselling and practical help, reducing the risk of violence and discrimination (Stengel, 2010; Weems, L., 2019). Whitehead's (2021) research demonstrates that, in formal contexts, social capital can connect with allies and find support outside their immediate networks. Sources such as virtual and face-to-face communities, provide respect, a sense of community with shared identities, counselling, empowerment, representation and mental health support. Despite the benefits, LGBTI young people often face significant barriers to accessing bridging networks due to discrimination and stigma, even within being in networks, discrimination is evidenced by their own power dynamics and prejudices, such as ageism, homophobia, ableism, islamophobia, racism and transphobia (Formby, 2017; Valentine & Skelton, 2003). This limits their ability to create wider connections and hinders their full participation in society (Fish et al., 2016).

1.4.2.3. Linking Social Capital: Accessing Institutional Resources and Empowerment

Linking social capital involves hierarchical relationships that enable LGBTI youth to access institutional resources and support. This type of capital is critical for establishing connections with public institutions, non-governmental organizations and other key actors that can provide institutional resources, such as safe shelters, legal assistance, mental health services, training programs and employment opportunities (Palfrey, 2017; Flensner and Von der Lippe, 2019). Linking social capital also drives LGBTI people's civic and political participation, enabling their access to community networks and organizations, their participation in decision-making (Pérez, 2020). This engagement is strengthened in policymaking, advocacy and equal opportunity advocacy, ensuring a safer community free from discrimination (Nugent & Deacon, 2022).

This kind of social capital promotes the visibility and social awareness of LGBTI people by linking and enabling them to collaborate with other community groups and organizations. Joint actions can be taken to educate and raise awareness of LGBTI rights, thus combating prejudice and negative stereotypes (London, et al., 2010). In addition, linkages connect individuals and groups to institutions or individuals in positions of power, allowing access to external resources

and opportunities. By maintaining social capital, strategic alliances can be formed with non-governmental organizations, public institutions and businesses, ensuring that LGBTI people have access to necessary resources (Mae, Cortez and Preiss, 2013), creating opportunities for belonging and positive social norms (London, et al., 2010).

2. Methodology

2.1. Participatory Approach

While many studies focus on LGBTI youth experiences in schools, examining policies, curriculum, and environments (Kosciw et al., 2019; Payne & Smith, 2018; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2020), this study addresses the underexplored area of non-formal education. Non-formal settings, such as those fostering agency and community initiatives, remain understudied despite their importance (Spaaij & Schulten, 2014; Janer Hidalgo & Úcar, 2020; Batsleer, 2013).

Using participatory methods, this study investigates how LGBTI youth in Actuavallès organization create safe spaces and navigate social capital dynamics within their community. Methods like photovoice, geolocation, and timeline tools capture nuanced experiences and position LGBTI youth as active contributors, not mere research subjects (Kendon, Pain & Kesby, 2007). These approaches are critical for analyzing the roles of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital in fostering resilience and connection (Putnam, 2000; Vaccaro et al., 2012).

A study of this nature, which seeks to investigate “social phenomena, situations, and processes that involve people, illuminating them for a variety of perspectives”, necessitates capturing participants’ responses in ways that extend beyond quantitative measurement (Hazzan & Nutov, 2014). Participants’ attitudes, emotions, and personal learnings often defy reduction into statistical data, requiring methods that prioritize depth and nuance. Consequently, and consistent with much of the literature cited in this research, which has employed qualitative approaches to authentically represent participants’ voices, this study adopts qualitative research methods to ensure a rich, contextual understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

Participatory qualitative methods were employed to process the data gathered from participants. A guide of open-ended questions was used during the workshops to capture diverse perspectives and insights. These questions, informed by themes identified in the literature review, ensure a comprehensive exploration of the topics under investigation. The data collection process emphasized depth and contextual understanding, while the subsequent analysis focused on identifying and interpreting emerging themes in relation to the research questions. This approach facilitated a nuanced understanding of the participants’ experiences and perspectives.

The research process was divided into four phases: mapping resources, data collection, participatory analysis, and synthesis. To ensure validity and depth of the

study, findings were triangulated by gathering data from participants with expert's insights in the construction of safe spaces within LGBTI activism in Spain, providing a broader contextual validation of the findings.

Participants were recruited from Actuavallès-Ca l'Enredus, a local LGBTI youth project in Sabadell during the period of April to June of 2022 where the main researcher leads the project as social educator. Inclusion criteria required participants to be between 14 and 21 years old and actively engaged in this NGO project. A total of 11 participants were involved, representing a range of experiences and perspectives. Although a total of 34 LGBTI young people participates in this project, many of them did not choose to participate in the research because they mentioned that they did not perceive a safe space in their community. One of the 11 participants ceased their participation during the research because they did not identify a safe space during the photovoice process. Data collection and analysis were conducted with an awareness of the indivisible interconnection between gender and sexuality experiences, recognizing these dimensions as inherently intertwined within systems of oppression. This approach acknowledges that the participants' experiences of discrimination cannot be understood in isolation but must be analyzed through the lens of their intersecting dissidences (Colins & Bilge, 2020).

The study adhered to ethical research standards, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any point. A trauma-informed approach was adopted to ensure emotional safety, particularly given the sensitive nature of the discussion. Every process was carried out in accordance with the institution of the CERec ethics committee of the Autonomous University of Barcelona.

2.1.1. Methods

2.1.1.1. Mapping resources

In a first phase, the social educator developed a target diagram based on Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (Fenech, 2018), to have a clear vision of the educational, protective, social and cultural resources that could be accessible to LGBTI youth in Sabadell. This preliminary approach allowed the research team to identify and map those potential spaces that could emerge within the territory, providing a basis that would help guide the subsequent phases of the study.

2.1.1.2. Photovoice

It was ensured that participants either had a mobile phone with a camera or had access to one to capture images that represent their experiences of safe spaces in their community. Photovoice was chosen for its ability to translate abstract feelings into visual, audio notes & digital text messages narratives, empowering participants to express themselves creatively while offering researchers a vivid understanding of their spatial realities. Photovoice allows for information to be produced autonomously from personal and intimate experiences.

2.1.1.3. Geolocation

Participants had a presential and virtual session to use Google Earth as geolocation tool²; they shared with the rest of the group their photovoice narratives located in physical spaces where they perceived as safe. This method enabled inspiration to other participants, on the representation of their safe spaces, to add more locations that did not come up during the photovoice process. During this process, the group made a collective definition of “safe space” by integrating everyone’s perspectives. The social educator transcribed the contributions in real-time on a shared digital text document, projected on the wall to ensure accuracy.

2.1.1.4. Timeline

Participants with their families were asked to create personal timelines that chart their experiences linked to the LGBTI community and historical and political movements that they remember over time. This was not to analyzed but as a return to create a space where youth participants can talk to their relatives and chosen families, about the construction of their safe spaces.

2.1.2. Data analyze

The data collected through the photovoice, and geolocation analysis were analyzed through frequency and density. The analysis was participatory, involving participants in identifying key themes and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This collaborative approach ensured that the findings were grounded in the participants’ realities and reflected their priorities and perspectives.

The use of participatory methods such as photovoice, geolocation, and timeline analysis provides a holistic understanding of how LGBTI youth experience and create safe spaces. These methods center the voices of participants, enabling the study to capture the physical, symbolic, and temporal dimensions of safety and social capital. By engaging LGBTI youth as co-researchers, this methodology not only generates rich qualitative data but also fosters empowerment, reinforcing the importance of inclusion and agency in academic research. The results were shared to the LGBTI participants, in group spaces and individually via WhatsApp. Participants provided feedback to confirm that the findings accurately reflected their individual contributions and the collective definition, ensuring validation, and representativeness of the results.

2.2. Participants Characteristics

Table 1

Participants Characteristics	
n=10	%

² Dataset open: <https://doi.org/10.34810/data1113>

Gender		
Cis men	2	20%
Trans men	6	60%
Trans woman	1	10%
Non Binary	1	10%
Sexual Orientation		
Gay	2	20%
Prefer not to say	8	80%
Age		
14-16	5	50%
18-21	5	50%
City based		
Sabadell	8	80%
Barberà del Vallès	1	10%
Terrassa	1	10%
Race		
White	9	90%
Black	1	10%
Education		
Secondary	5	50%
High school	3	30%
Professional training	2	20%
Neurodivergency		
With diagnosis	3	30%
Undiagnosed	7	70%
Family participation		
Yes	7	70%
No	3	30%
Family bond		
Consanguinity	5	50%
Chosen family	2	20%

The participants from the Actuavallès NGO project in Sabadell, represent a range of identities, emphasizing the intersectionality present within the LGBTI community. The majority identify as a trans* men (60%), with smaller representation of cis-men, trans women, and non-binary individuals. Sexual orientation was predominantly undisclosed, reflecting a preference for privacy among participants. Age distribution was evenly split between younger adolescents (14-16 years) and older youth (18-21 years).

Furthermore, most participants resided in Sabadell, with a minority from nearby cities. The racial composition was predominantly white, with one participant identifying as Black. Educational background varied, including secondary and professional training, while neurodivergence was acknowledged, with 30% having a formal diagnosis. The richness of these perspectives is integral to the study's exploration of resilience, identity affirmation, and social capital dynamics within the context of LGBTI youth.

3. Results

Firstly, it was important to understand the participants' experiences in their safe spaces within their communities. Despite the diverse age range of participants, their experiences of safe spaces reveal striking similarities across different communities. Participants across the spectrum described comparable feelings of vulnerability, exclusion, and the search for affirmation, which transcend age-specific differences. Younger participants emphasized the importance of familiar acceptance and peer relationships, while older participants focused on the role of community spaces and digital platforms. The findings of this study presented below are based on the research questions stipulated.

3.1. Characteristics in LGBTI youth safe spaces

All participants emphasized the need to describe the **physical attributes of spaces** when identifying them as safe. Across the range of identified spaces - natural, private, digital, and leisure- participants consistently associated safety with specific physical features or spatial dynamics that aligned with their emotional and social needs. Participants frequently cited natural settings such as *La cuesta del rato*, *La Caixa gardens*, *La Mola*, *Torrent de Colobriers*, and *Torressana forest* as spaces that provided tranquility and emotional refuge. These areas were described as places where they could disconnect from societal pressures and experience a sense of peace, solitude, and connection with nature. Private spaces, including bedrooms, homes, grandmother's houses, and workspaces, were described as intimate environments offering protection and freedom of self-expression. Digital spaces, such as Spotify and Twitch, were highlighted for providing avenues of connection and self-curated safety. Leisure spaces, including the LGBTI+ meetings, youth centers, gyms and climbing wall spaces, were recognized for fostering community, shared activities, and social connection. Some participants responded as follow:

Participant (07): "A safe space is with my queer friends where I can laugh and have fun days to remember, like when I celebrated my birthday and know that topics can be discussed without awkward situations..."

Participant (02): "A safe space for all of us are the LGBTI meetings we have at the *Estruch* on Saturday afternoons..."

Participant (11): "A place where you feel welcome regardless of your mood..."



Participant 11, 2022

All participants described their safe spaces by **evidencing feelings** such as security, peace, calm, joy, and confidence are further illustrated by participant 02 audio note response: *“When I feel bad and when I am like this... they always kiss me on my forehead, and it makes me feel much better...”* or participant 01 said: *“Watching the moon is something that comforts me and makes me feel good and at peace.”* Participants consistently associated these feelings with the physical and emotional characteristics of their safe spaces. Also, participants identified safe spaces linked to **protection**, including care and learning processes, as well as security. This was exemplified by participant 11, who stated: *“...where there is love, care, understanding, and above all continuous growth and learning...”* Simultaneously, they identified **apprenticeships** as an integral characteristic of their safe spaces, encompassing factors as peer learning, non-formal education, and creative activities like reading and drawing. These spaces were described as environments where participants could acquire new skills, share knowledge with peers, and engage in self-directed learning. A participant response as follow:

Participant (03): *“In the climbing center, the atmosphere is friendly and if I need support to finish a route there is always someone available to teach me and make me feel comfortable”*



Participant 03, 2022

Participants identified **emotional security** as a fundamental aspect emphasizing features such as feeling cheerful, grateful, pleased, delighted, vibrant, confident, loved, and optimistic. Participants identified these aspects in **horizontal community** as a characteristic of their safe spaces, encompassing family ties, friendships, sex-affective relationships, online gaming partners, and classmates, all of which contributed to a sense of belonging. These relationships were central to their experiences of safety and support, as exemplified by participant 05, who stated: *“I feel safe with the secondary school art class group...”*. Similarly, another participant highlighted the importance of familiar connections, saying: *“In my mum’s house I feel safe because there are people I love, I feel protected and it’s a place where everything seems easier to me.”* These narratives underscore how relational dynamics within horizontal communities foster emotional security and connection in participants identified safe spaces.



Participant 05, 2022



Participant 07, 2022

Participants identified **mutual respect** as a core characteristic of their safe spaces, defined through dimensions such as consent, dialogue, understanding, and boundaries. Consent was reflected in the ability to set personal limits, as one participant shared: *“I can ask for personal space if I have an anxiety crisis without feeling judged.”* Dialogue was highlighted for its role in sharing emotions, exemplified by the statement: *“Joy, if shared, is multiplied by two, while sorrow is divided by two.”* Understanding emerged as a crucial factor, particularly in spaces where participants felt validated and connected to others within the LGBTIAQ+ community, as one participant described in the Geolocation workshop: *“Where I can meet people like me and feel understood as part of the LGBTIAQ+ community.”* Boundaries were also central, as reflected in the sentiment: *“In my own room, I can have that moment of disconnection.”* Participant 07 encapsulated these themes through their narrative, saying:

“I feel more comfortable with my boyfriend, and we can show all our love for each other. This photo is one of our most beautiful moments and represents our freedom to show ourselves to the world as we are, giving thanks that this can be possible today.”



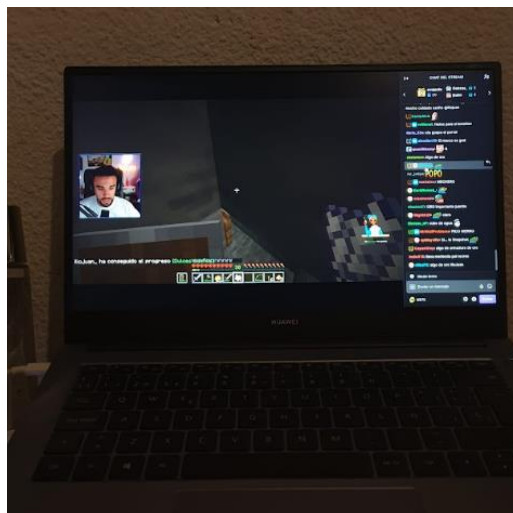
Participant 07, 2022

Participants highlighted the **absence of prejudices** as a vital element of their safe spaces, identifying key factors such as avoiding feelings of pressure, judgment, and coercion. These spaces were described as an environment where individuals felt free from societal expectations and could authentically express themselves. Participant 08 exemplified this sentiment, stating: *“Nature in solitude of with myself gives me security when I am not pressured or being judged and being able to express myself or be myself... this is what makes me feel good.”*



Participant 08, 2022

Although less frequently discussed, participants also commented on additional characteristics of their safe spaces. These included the presence of **common rules**, such as maintaining soft lighting, a comfortable temperature, a smoke-free environment, and speaking in a soft tone. Participants also noted the importance of spaces **free from cultural violence**, where understanding, empathy, and **non-violent communication** were prioritized. The ability to make mistakes without fear of judgment, **opportunities for resistance**, and not being questioned when needing to walk away were also valued features.



3.2. Dynamics of Social Capital in LGBTI youth Safe Spaces

Participants narratives and contributions to the study revealed the significant role of bonding social capital in shaping and maintaining safe spaces for LGBTI youth. Participants consistently described close interpersonal relationships –such as family ties, friendships, sex-affective relationships, and peer groups- as central to their sense of security and belonging. These connections were often rooted in shared experiences and mutual understanding, fostering environments of trust and care. For instance, participant 07 emphasized the importance of their intimate relationships, sharing: *“I can tell my partner anything without being judged...”* Similarly, another participant described the significance of familiar bonds, stating: *“In my grandmother’s house, I feel cared for and understood, and it’s a place where I can always be myself.”*



Participant 05, 2022

While bonding capital dominated, bridging and linking forms of social capital were less frequently reported. Bridging capital –connections that span diverse groups- was primarily mentioned in contexts such as youth centers and community events, where participants interacted with individuals outside their immediate social circles. Participant 11 highlighted this during the LGBTI+ meetings at the community center *“These Saturday afternoons at the Estruch feel like a place for all of us; we can talk, laugh, and connect in ways that feel natural”* or *“where I work... people call the bar “the lesbian bar” but to me is a safe space.”* However, these bridging opportunities were often described as situational rather than sustained, limiting their long-term impact.



Participant 11, 2022

Linking capital –connections to institutions and systems of power- was notably absent. Although some participants referenced the supportive role of organizations like climbing gyms or municipal LGBTI+ organizations, these connections were often indirect or limited in scope. For example, participant 02 noted: *“The workshops we attend are great, but they don’t go beyond that. We don’t really have the chance to speak with people who make decisions.”* This lack of institutional engagement reflects a gap in structural support and advocacy opportunities for participants.

4. Discussion

This study underscores the essential role of safe spaces in mitigating the LGBTIphobia culture. These environments act as protective and empowering platforms that counteract societal stigma, promote identity affirmation, and facilitate resilience (Gandy, 2015). As explored in the findings, safe spaces are not static; they encompass dynamic physical, social, and symbolic dimensions that reflect the diverse needs and lived experiences of LGBTI youth.

4.1. Characteristics and Social Capital Dynamics of LGBTI Safe Spaces

The findings of this study underscore the dynamic and multifaceted nature of safe spaces as essential sites for fostering belonging, emotional security, and identity affirmation among LGBTI youth (Cserni & Talmud, 2015). These spaces, spanning physical, digital, and relational dimensions, emerge as both places for personal and collective growth without the fear of experience LGBTIphobia as Iversen (2019) and Flensner & Von der Lippe (2019) stated. As Vaccaro (2012) pointed, these spaces are identified in informal structures with the goal to create a safer community (Auestad, 2018). A key insight is the centrality of bonding social capital, with participants highlighting the importance of intimate relationships, peer networks, and chosen families in creating environments of trust and support. For instance, as Ahmed (2006) argued, that can reinforce segregation by isolating them from broader societal engagement, still brings new opportunities through innovative

activities to proliferate with better inclusivity (Vu, 2022) as Arao and Clemens (2013) proposed with the term “brave spaces”.

This study aligns with previous literature emphasizing safe spaces as vital for emotional security, identity affirmation, community building actively co-creating inclusive and secure settings through situated practices among LGBTI youth (Valentine & Skelton, 2003; Vaccaro et al., 2012; Djohari et al., 2018). Consistent with prior research, bonding social capital emerged as the most significant dynamic, fostering trust and mutual support within intimate networks (Kwon, 2013). However, unlike earlier findings that highlighted the role of bridging and linking capital in expanding resources and advocacy opportunities (Nugent & Deacon, 2022; Putnam, 2000), this study revealed a notable scarcity of these forms, particularly linking capital, reflecting limited institutional engagement and systemic support (Fish et al., 2016). This discrepancy underscores a key limitation: the study’s localized focus within a small group that participates in the NGO project may restrict generalizability to broader contexts with varying sociopolitical climates. A significant strength lies in its participatory methodology, which empowered LGBTI youth to articulate their experiences for knowledge-generation process (Kendon, et al., 2007), yet a small sample size limits the study’s scope. Unexpectedly, digital platforms, while initially perceived as a safe space, were also identified as sites of exclusion and algorithmic biases, complicating their role in fostering inclusivity (Sepulveda-Parrini et al., 2024). These findings highlight the evolving nature of safe spaces and the necessity for multifaceted approaches to inclusivity that integrate diverse forms of social capital (Úcar, 2015).

This research set out to explore how LGBTI youth in Actuavallès NGO conceptualize and create safe spaces while analysing the role of social capital dynamics in maintaining these environments. The findings affirm the hypothesis that safe spaces are critical to mitigate LGBTIphobia, to promote mutual respect, emotional safety and participatory learning, with bonding social capital playing a central role. The study’s significance lies in its contribution to understanding how participatory approaches and community-driven frameworks can address the unique needs of discriminated groups, particularly in the context of evolving legislative and social landscapes. However, unanswered questions remain, particularly regarding the mechanisms to create safe spaces within bridging and linking social capital to extend inclusivity beyond immediate networks. As Esparza Sosa (2022) presents in their study, appreciating, respecting, and valuing the cultural and social capital of LGBTI youth would create stronger relationships and greater opportunities to access and maintain bridging social capital. Future research could investigate the intersectionality of race, socioeconomic status, and migratory backgrounds in shaping access to safe spaces and social capital.

The findings of this study underscore the critical role that trusted relationships play in fostering safe spaces for LGBTI youth. The presence of at least one trusted adult, acting as a confidant and advocate, has been shown to significantly enhance

the resilience and well-being of LGBTI youth (Vincent, 2019). Such relationships provide emotional support and guidance, helping youth navigate the challenges posed by societal stigma and discrimination. These trusted figures, whether they are family members, educators, or community leaders, serve as stabilizing forces within the often-precarious experiences of LGBTI youth, highlighting the value of mentorship and advocacy in safe space creation.

However, while the presence of supportive adults and peers is vital, the literature also acknowledges limitations and gaps in such support systems. For instance, the reliance on individual engagement in safe space development (Nugent & Deacon, 2022). Moreover, access to trusted adults or allies may be uneven in the communities with entrenched anti-LGBTI thoughts (Fish et al., 2016). This finding calls for strategies that integrate mentorship programs, allyship training, and community-building initiatives with LGBTI+ perspectives.

A key contribution of this research lies in its participatory approach, which empowered LGBTI youth actively co-create knowledge and articulate their unique perspectives. This methodology ensured that the voices of participants were central to the research process, fostering a sense of agency and inclusion (Kendon, Pain & Kesby, 2007). By prioritizing participatory methods, the study was able to capture the nuanced and context-specific experiences of safe spaces, emphasizing the importance of centering youth perspectives in academic and practical frameworks. Additionally, longitudinal studies could assess how institutional frameworks and digital platforms evolve to support LGBTI youth safe spaces. These directions are essential for developing more comprehensive strategies to ensure safe spaces remain dynamic and accessible to everyone.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the vital role of safe spaces in counteracting LGBTIphobia by providing environments that promote belonging, identity affirmation, and resilience for LGBTI youth. These spaces, encompassing physical, digital, and relational dimensions, act as dynamic platforms that reflect diverse needs and lived experiences. By centering bonding social capital, safe spaces foster intimate networks of trust and mutual support, affirming their transformative potential in mitigating the adverse effects of societal stigma and exclusion.

Future research should delve into mechanisms for expanding bridging and linking social capital to enhance systemic support for LGBTI youth. Intersectional studies exploring the experiences of racialized individuals, those from migratory backgrounds, and youth in varied geographic and socioeconomic contexts are crucial to broadening understanding. Longitudinal research is needed to examine the integration of social capital into institutional frameworks and to assess the evolving role of digital platforms. By addressing these diversities, future studies can strengthen

the capacity of safe spaces to serve as inclusive, adaptive, and impactful environments for all LGBTI youth.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process.

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used ChatGPT to improve the readability and language of the manuscript. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

6. References

- Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, objects, others*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388074>
- Arao, B., & Clemens, K. (2013). From safe spaces to brave spaces: A new way to frame dialogue around diversity and social justice. In L. M. Landreman (Ed.), *The art of effective facilitation: Reflections from social justice educators* (pp. 135–150). Stylus Publishing.
- Auestad, L. (2018). *Respect, plurality, and prejudice: A psychoanalytical and philosophical enquiry into the dynamics of social exclusion and discrimination*. Routledge.
- Bacqué, M. H., & Biewener, C. (2013). L'empowerment, un nouveau vocabulaire pour parler de participation?. *Idées économiques et sociales*, (3), 25-32.
- Batsleer, J. (2013). Youth work, social education, democratic practice and the challenge of difference: A contribution to debate. *Oxford Review of Education*, 39(3), 287-306.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Brownlie, J. (2018). Cuidarnos unos a otros en línea: Alcance digital, vigilancia emocional y espacios seguros. *Emotion, Space and Society*, 27, 60-67. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2018.02.001>
- Carrera-Fernández, M. V., & DePalma, R. (2020). Feminism will be trans-inclusive or it will not be: Why do two cis-hetero woman educators support transfeminism? *The Sociological Review*, 68(4), 745–762. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120934686>
- Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2020). *Intersectionality*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Cortez, D., & Preiss, R. W. (2013). Safe spaces, difficult dialogues, and critical thinking. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 7(2), 5.
- Cserni, R.T. & Talmud, I. (2015), To Know that you are Not Alone: The effect of internet usage on LGBT youth's social capital". *In Communication and Information*

- Technologies Annual (Studies in Media and Communications)* (Vol. 9, pp. 161-182). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S2050-206020150000009007>
- Djohari, N., Pyndiah, G., & Arnone, A. (2018). Repensar los "espacios seguros" en las geografías de los niños. *Children's Geographies* 16(4), 351-355. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2018.1487032>
- Esparza Sosa, K. (2022). *Leveraging social capital for gender and sexuality alliances* (Doctoral dissertation, Memorial University of Newfoundland).
- Fish, J. N., Moody, R. L., Grossman, A. H., & Russell, S. T. (2019). LGBTQ youth-serving community-based organizations: Who participates and what difference does it make?. *Journal of youth and adolescence*, 48, 2418-2431.
- Formby, E. (2017). *Exploring LGBT spaces and communities: Contrasting identities, belongings and wellbeing*. Routledge.
- Flensner, K. K., & Von der Lippe, M. (2019). Being safe from what and safe for whom? A critical discussion of the conceptual metaphor of 'safe space'. *Intercultural education*, 30(3), 275-288.
- Frost, D. M., & Meyer, I. H. (2012). Measuring community connectedness among diverse sexual minority populations. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 49(1), 36-49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2011.565427>
- Gandy, O. H. (2015). Coming to terms with chance: Engaging rational discrimination and cumulative disadvantage. *Media, Culture & Society*, 38(4), 571-589. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443716635842>
- Gandy, M. E. (2015). Interventions for LGBTQ Youth Suicide: A Review of Two Books. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 12(1), 105-112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2014.935557>
- Generalitat de Catalunya. (2023). *RADIOGRAFIA DE L'LGBTI-FÒBIA A CATALUNYA 2023*. <https://igualtat.gencat.cat/web/.content/Ambits/LGBTI/publicacions/Radiografia-de-LLGBTI-Fobia-a-Catalunya-2023.pdf>
- Government of Spain (2023) Ley 4/2023, de 28 de febrero, para la igualdad real y efectiva de las personas trans y para la garantía de los derechos de las personas LGTBI. BOE, 51 March 1st BOE-A2023-5366 <https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2023/BOE-A-2023-5366-consolidado.pdf>

- Greytak, E. A., Kosciw, J. G., Villenas, C., & Giga, N. M. (2016). *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate Revisited. A Survey of US Secondary School Students and Teachers*. Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). 121 West 27th Street Suite 804, New York, NY 10001.
- Hazzan, O., & Nutov, L. (2014). Qualitative research and research-based practice. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 12(1), 52–64.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2014.974826>
- Huang, J. (2015). " Very different from most other people": Identity Exploration and Development in Queer and Ally Youths in Out of School Programs and on Social Media.
- Higa, D., Hoppe, M. J., Lindhorst, T., Mincer, S., Beadnell, B., Morrison, D. M., Wells, E. A., Todd, A., & Mountz, S. (2014). Negative and Positive Factors Associated With the Well-Being of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning (LGBTQ) Youth. *Youth & Society*, 46(5), 663-687.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X12449630>
- Hunter, M. A. (2008). Cultivating the art of safe space. *Research in Drama Education*, 13(1), 5-21.
- Inchley, J., Currie, D., Budisavljevic, S., Torsheim, T., Jåstad, A., Cosma, A., Kelly, C., Arnarsson, A. M., & Samdal, O. (2020). Spotlight on adolescent health and well-being. Findings from the 2017/2018 *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey in Europe and Canada. International report*. Volume 2. Key data. WHO Publications. <https://www.euro.who.int/en/publications/abstracts/spotlight-on-adolescent-health-and-well-being.-findings-from-the-20172018-health-behaviour-in-school-aged-children-hbsc-survey-in-europeand-canada.-international-report.-volume-2.-key-data>
- Iversen, L. L. (2019). De los espacios seguros a las comunidades de desacuerdo. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 41(3), 315-326.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2018.1445617>
- Janer Hidalgo, À., & Úcar, X. (2020). Social pedagogy in the world today: An analysis of the academic, training and professional perspectives. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 50(3), 701-721.
- Johns, M. M., Beltran, O., Armstrong, H. L., Jayne, P. E., & Barrios, L. C. (2018). Protective factors among transgender and gender variant youth: A systematic review by socioecological level. *The journal of primary prevention*, 39, 263-301.

- Kambunga, A. P., Smith, R. C., Winschiers-Theophilus, H., & Otto, T. (2023). Decolonial design practices: Creating safe spaces for plural voices on contested pasts, presents, and futures. *Design Studies*, 86, 101170. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2023.101170>
- Kindon, S., Pain, R., & Kesby, M. (2007). Participatory action research approaches and methods. *Connecting people, participation and place*. Abingdon: Routledge, 260.
- Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., Truong, N. L., & Zongrone, A. D. (2020). *The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation's Schools. A Report from GLSEN*. Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN). 121 West 27th Street Suite 804, New York, NY 10001.
- Kwon, P. (2013). Resilience in lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 17(4), 371-383.
- Langarita, J. A., Trull-Oliva, C., Villá, M., & Montserrat, C. (2023). “It wasn’t the priority”: Non-binary children experiences wave of COVID-19. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-023-00893-1>
- Law 11/2014, of 10 October, to guarantee the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people and to eradicate homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. (2014). *Official Gazette of the Government of Catalonia*. <https://portaldogc.gencat.cat>
- LeFrançois, B. A. (2013). Queering Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services: The Subversion of Heteronormativity in Practice. *Children & Society*., 27(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1099-0860.2011.00371.x>
- London, R. A., Pastor Jr, M., Servon, L. J., Rosner, R., & Wallace, A. (2010). The role of community technology centers in promoting youth development. *Youth & Society*, 42(2), 199-228.
- López-Sáez, M. Á., Platero, L., Langarita, J. A., & Sadurní, N. (2024). Professional Insights into Navigating Support for LGBTI Children in Spain. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 1-13.
- Martinez, O., & Dodge, B. (2010). El barrio de La Chueca of Madrid, Spain: An emerging epicenter of the global LGBT civil rights movement. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 57(2), 226-248.
- Martino, W., Kassen, J., & Omercajic, K. (2024). Trans and nonbinary students’ accounts of schooling: on epistemic witnessing, trans livability and the failure of the school cistem. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 1-26.

- Motos-Teruel, T. (2018). Teatro y beneficios para el desarrollo positivo. Un estudio con adolescentes valencianos.
- Nordmarken, S. (2023). Coming Into Identity: How Gender Minorities Experience Identity Formation. *Gender & Society: Official Publication of Sociologists for Women in Society*, 37(4), 584–613. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08912432231172992>
- Nugent, B., & Deacon, K. (2022). Seen and Heard: The Long-Term Impact of Arts Projects on Young People Living in Poverty. *YOUNG*, 30(5), 511-524.ç
- Payne, E. C., & Smith, M. J. (2018). Refusing Relevance: School Administrator Resistance to Offering Professional Development Addressing LGBTQ Issues in Schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 54(2), 183–215. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X17723426>
- Pearce, R., Erikainen, S., & Vincent, B. (2020). Afterword: TERF wars in the time of COVID-19. *The Sociological Review*, 68(4), 882-888. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120934712>
- Pérez Aronsson, F. (2020). Do I look white. *Creating community in online safe spaces for racialized youth*.
- Platero, R. L., & López-Sáez, M. Á. (2023). Community responses to LGBT+ adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities during the COVID-19 confinement in Madrid. *International Social Work*, 66(1), 107-116. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00208728211044741>
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community. *Simon Schuster*.
- Ryan, C. L., & Hermann-Wilmarth, J. M. (2020). Heteronormative gatekeeping when enacting queer research in elementary schools: An autoethnographic perspective. *Journal of lesbian studies*, 24(4), 378-394.
- Sapag, J. C., & Kawachi, I. (2007). Capital social y promoción de la salud en América Latina. *Revista de Saúde Pública*, 41, 139-149. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0034-89102007000100019>
- Sepúlveda-Parrini, P., Pineda-Herrero, P., & Valdivia-Vizarreta, P. (2024). Conceptos claves para la calidad de la educación superior online. *RIED-Revista Iberoamericana de Educación a Distancia*, 27(1), 319-343.
- Snapp, S. D., Watson, R. J., Russell, S. T., Diaz, R. M., & Ryan, C. (2015). Social support networks for LGBT young adults: Low-cost strategies for positive adjustment. *Family relations*, 64(3), 420-430.

- Spaaij, R., & Schlenker, N. (2014). Cultivating Safe Space: Lessons for Sport-Development Projects and Events. *Journal of Sport Management*, 28(6), 633-645. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2013-0304>
- Stengel, B. S. (2010). The complex case of fear and safe space. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 29, 523-540.
- Teasley, C. (2004). The Culture of Discourse on Educational Reform in Spain. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 26(4), 249-275. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714410490905302>
- Tina Dürbaum & Frank A. Sattler (2019): Minority stress and mental health in lesbian, gay male, and bisexual youths: A meta-analysis, *Journal of LGBT Youth*, DOI: 10.1080/19361653.2019.1586615
- Úcar, X. (2015). Comunidades en movimiento: los planes de desarrollo comunitario como promotores de capital social. *Educació Social. Revista d'Intervenció Socioeducativa*, 59, 115-130.
- Vaccaro, A., August, G., & Kennedy, M. S. (2012). *Safe spaces: Making schools and communities welcoming to LGBT youth*. Praeger.
- Vale Nieves, O. (2019). Disforia de género: la psicopatologización de las sexualidades alternas. *Quaderns de Psicologia*, 21(2), e1 478. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5565/rev/qpsicologia.1478>
- Valentine, G., & Skelton, T. (2003). Finding oneself, losing oneself: The lesbian and gay 'scene' as a paradoxical space. *International journal of urban and regional research*, 27(4), 849-866.
- Vu, T. V. (2022). Linking LGBT inclusion and national innovative capacity. *Social Indicators Research*, 159(1), 191-214.
- Weems, L. (2019). Thinking queer about the space of school safety: Violence and displacement of LGBTQ youth of color. *Queer pedagogies: Theory, praxis, politics*, 93-108.
- Wernick, L. J., Kulick, A., & Woodford, M. R. (2014). How theater within a transformative organizing framework cultivates individual and collective empowerment among LGBTQ youth. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 42(7), 838-853.
- Whitehead, M. A. (2021). "Where are my people at?": A community cultural wealth analysis of how lesbian, gay, and bisexual community college students of color access community and support. In *Graduate Students' Research about Community Colleges* (pp. 70-82). Routledge.

- Wilson, C., & Cariola, L. A. (2020). LGBTQI+ youth and mental health: A systematic review of qualitative research. *Adolescent Research Review*, 5(2), 187-211.
- Woolcock, M. (1998). Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework. *Theory and society*, 27(2), 151-208.

Highlights

- Characteristics of safe spaces in which LGBTI youth participate
- Safe spaces are defined by interpersonal relationships, fostering feelings of protection, trust and mutual respect.
- The participative methodology as photovoice, contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the community importance of safe spaces for LGBTI individuals.

Ethics Statement

This study adhered to the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval for the research was obtained from CERec ethics committee of the Autonomous University of Barcelona, ensuring compliance with all applicable ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. For participants under the age of 18, consent was secured from their legal guardians, and assent was also obtained from the minors themselves. The research was conducted with a trauma-informed approach to ensure participants' emotional safety, particularly given the sensitivity of the subject matter. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any repercussions. All data were anonymized to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants.