

Proud and Present: Happy Pride Month!

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As old as human civilization gets we can see Queer footprints in art, literature, and history. “Gayness” was not invented when Hitler started marking gay people with pink triangles, it existed throughout human history, so did oppression. India decriminalized homosexuality in 2018 (1), there are still 73 countries criminalizing homosexuality, and 15 countries criminalizing the gender identity and/or expression of transgender people (2). Same-sex marriage was illegal globally until 2001, it is legal in only 24 countries currently. That shows the legal equalization of the LGBTI+ community accelerated in the last two decades, however, we are nowhere near the perfectly equal treatment. In this article, we will touch upon the daily struggles that Queer people face and the cis-heteronormative social structure that feeds from hate.

Gender roles and expressions are binary in most cultures and expected to be followed strictly. These ongoing expectations and unwritten rules are the core reasons why any gender expression other than cisgender has been labeled as “abnormal” by society. Cross-dressing, makeup and accessories on men, body hair on women, are some of the appearance-related issues that have been public-opinion-based for so many years. Gender roles became such a core element of the society that a part of the feminism movement excludes transgender women, that group is called “Trans Exclusive Radical Feminists” (TERF). This view is not bearable to even think about, they want equality but only for cisgender people, it does not fit with the feminist ideology to begin with, but we cannot unpack this issue here more deeply. To move on with the hardship transgender people face; healthcare services such as hormone treatments and top surgeries should be accessible and cheap, instead, even a daily doctor visit can be hard to attend for trans people because of the transphobic behaviors of doctors. Expecting as little as the basic healthcare without harassment about their identity can be seen optimistic when we think about being homosexual and transgender is seen as diseases in some cultures/countries, even WHO categorized being transgender as a mental disorder until 2019.(3) As close as the last month, Hungary’s parliament has voted to end legal recognition for trans people which means people cannot change their gender after it is set according to their “sex at birth” and their names that were chosen from a list kept by the country’s Academy of Sciences, which is sorted according to gender.(4) The year is 2020 and the conversion “therapy” is still legal in most of the world, even most of the western countries. Such a humiliating and dehumanizing approach is considered as a medical treatment to “cure” the “abnormal” behavior of Queer -mostly- teenagers, which will be a traumatic memory that will affect their future selves.

With the proliferation of Pride marches and parades around the world and the general public's incrementally improved embrace of the LGBTI+ community and movement, many corporations and brands started trying to make a place for themselves in the festivities. Known not-so-affectionately as "Rainbow Capitalism," some forms of this include advertising on billboards, shooting television and digital ads, modifying social media presence to include versions of the rainbow flag and sending floats and/or employees to Pride parades all in an attempt to appeal to the LGBTI+ population and establish a sense of support among the community. These attempts have been dismissed as a cheap marketing tactic by Queer circles, citing the lack of support for the community when it wasn't commercially or politically convenient in the past and the fact that the very same corporations trying to inject themselves into Pride celebrations cause or exacerbate the problems Pride celebrations are trying to overcome.

One of the huge problems the LGBTI+ community is facing right now is hate crimes. Many countries do not have legislation in place to protect LGBTI+ people from hate crimes. Moreover, the state of legislation concerning LGBTI+ people is extremely varied in nature, with 12 countries punishing homosexuality by death and 11 countries constitutional protections for LGBTI+ people(5). Hate speech against LGBTI+ people significantly increases during crises and natural disasters, as LGBTI+ people are used as a scapegoat, with people claiming these events are a form of punishment for LGBTI+ people. A recent example of this happened in Turkey this year. President of Religious Affairs of Turkey Ali Erbaş claimed same-sex relationships were linked to the COVID-19 outbreak in a Friday sermon in April 2020. The Turkish LGBTI+ community and allies responded to this on social media, Tweeting with the hashtag #LGBTİHaklarıİnsanHaklarıdır (#LGBTIRightsareHumanRights). Then followed an organized campaign of hate speech, powered by the supporters of the government and Erbaş, some even suggesting LGBTI+ people move to The Netherlands if they wish to lead a happy and healthy life with legal protections of their rights. This type of behavior puts Queer people in a very dangerous position as the daily vitriol against them enables further violence and hate towards them.

In order to dig more into the political aspect of hate against the LGBTI+ community, we need to explore one specific political group's opinions and behaviors: Conservatives. This group includes mostly privileged and religious people who are willing to live by their cultural/religious traditions and norms, also have extreme hatred against the people who are out of their norms. Regardless of which religion they are bound to, we can see these behaviors all around the world. According to a research done in North America in 2017, **religious opposition to same-sex marriage is linked to sexual prejudice and conservative**

preferences to maintain the status quo.(6) In order to maintain their privilege and political stance, they stand against other people's freedom, love, and -in some cases- lives. This is not only conservatives seeing themselves greater than Queer people, but they also use their privilege and the authority of tradition to eliminate Queer people from society.

This is a very good time to look at why we need to celebrate Pride this year bolder, happier, and more passionate than ever. The LGBTI+ community has made enormous progress until now, and it's going nowhere. More and more countries are extending non-discriminatory protections for LGBTI+ people, Queer people are getting more representation in media and government than ever, and societies' attitudes towards LGBTI+ people are shifting to an ever-positive position. We also need to celebrate because there is much more progress left to be made. The tidal wave of equality and liberation hasn't reached everyone equally yet, and small steps that are already made aren't enough to dismantle a system of repression and exclusion society has fostered for a long time.

(1) <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/02/homosexuality-india>

(2) https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/?type_filter=criminal_lgbt

(3) <https://time.com/5596845/world-health-organization-transgender-identity/>

(4) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/19/hungary-votes-to-end-legal-recognition-of-trans-people>

(5) https://ilga.org/downloads/ILGA_World_map_sexual_orientation_laws_December2019.pdf

(6) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5665159/>