

UNDERSTANDING LGBTQ+

LGBTQ+ HISTORY & WHY PRIDE MATTERS

Remembering struggle, progress, visibility and
community

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Remembering struggle, progress, visibility and community

"It takes no compromise to give people their rights." — Harvey Milk

Introduction

Every year, millions of people around the world celebrate Pride through marches, community events, educational activities and moments of reflection. For some, Pride is a joyful celebration of identity and belonging. For others, it is a reminder of the discrimination, prejudice and inequality that LGBTQ+ people have faced throughout history.

A common question is, "Why is there a Pride Month?" Others wonder why LGBTQ+ history is discussed at all.

Understanding LGBTQ+ history is not about dwelling on the past or creating division. It is about recognising the experiences of people whose voices have often been overlooked, acknowledging the progress that has been made, and understanding why equality, visibility and inclusion continue to matter.

Many of the rights enjoyed by LGBTQ+ people today were not freely given. They were achieved through decades of advocacy by individuals and communities who challenged discrimination and worked towards greater equality.

Learning about this history helps us appreciate the importance of creating environments where everyone can live openly, safely and authentically.

Why Does LGBTQ+ History Matter?

History shapes the society we live in today.

For many years, LGBTQ+ people experienced criminalisation, discrimination and exclusion in many parts of the world. Fear of rejection meant that many hid significant parts of their lives from family, friends, employers and communities.

Understanding this history helps explain why issues such as visibility, inclusion and legal protections remain important.

It also reminds us that social attitudes can change. Progress often begins when people are willing to listen, learn and challenge unfair treatment.

A Brief History of LGBTQ+ Rights

Throughout history, diverse sexual orientations and gender identities have existed across many cultures. However, attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people have varied greatly depending on the time, place and culture.

In more recent history, many LGBTQ+ people experienced:

- Criminal laws targeting same-sex relationships.

Discrimination in employment and housing.

Barriers to healthcare.

Social stigma and rejection.

Pressure to hide their identity.

Over time, campaigners, activists and allies worked to challenge these inequalities through peaceful protest, education and advocacy.

These efforts have contributed to significant legal and social changes in many countries, although experiences and legal protections continue to vary across the world.

The Stonewall Uprising

One of the most significant events in modern LGBTQ+ history took place in June 1969 at the Stonewall Inn in New York City.

Following a police raid on the venue, members of the LGBTQ+ community resisted ongoing harassment and discrimination. The events that followed became a catalyst for greater activism and are widely recognised as a turning point in the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement.

While many people contributed to this movement, figures such as Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera and countless others helped inspire future generations to advocate for equality and inclusion.

The anniversary of these events is one of the reasons Pride is celebrated during June in many countries.

What Is Pride?

Pride means different things to different people.

For some, it is a celebration.

For others, it is remembrance.

For many, it is both.

Pride events often include:

- Community celebrations.

Educational activities.

Cultural performances.

Opportunities to connect with others.

Recognition of LGBTQ+ history.

Advocacy for equality and inclusion.

Although colourful parades often receive the most media attention, Pride is also about acknowledging the ongoing importance of acceptance, safety and belonging.

Why Visibility Matters

Many LGBTQ+ people have spent years feeling unable to be open about who they are.

Visibility can help reduce feelings of isolation by reminding individuals that they are not alone.

Seeing diverse identities represented in schools, workplaces, healthcare and the media can contribute to a greater sense of belonging and understanding.

Visibility also helps challenge stereotypes by showing that LGBTQ+ people come from every background, profession, culture, religion and community.

Pride Is Different for Everyone

Not every LGBTQ+ person attends Pride events.

Some enjoy large community celebrations.

Others prefer quieter ways of recognising their identity.

Some may not feel safe attending public events because of personal, cultural, family or geographical circumstances.

Choosing not to attend Pride does not make someone's identity any less valid.

Pride is not a requirement.

It is one of many ways people may choose to celebrate, remember or connect with their community.

The Role of Allies

Progress has never been achieved by LGBTQ+ people alone.

Parents, friends, colleagues, teachers, healthcare professionals, employers and community members have all played important roles in supporting inclusion.

Being an ally does not require having all the answers.

It involves:

- Listening.

Learning.

Challenging discrimination.

Using respectful language.

Supporting equality.

Creating safe and inclusive environments.

Small actions, repeated consistently, can have a meaningful impact.

Common Misconceptions

"Pride is only a party."

While celebrations are part of Pride, it also has historical, educational and community significance.

"LGBTQ+ equality has already been achieved."

Although significant progress has been made in many countries, experiences vary widely, and some people continue to face discrimination and barriers.

"History doesn't matter anymore."

Understanding history helps explain why equality, inclusion and legal protections continue to be important today.

"Pride excludes people who aren't LGBTQ+."

Many Pride events welcome allies, families and communities who wish to show support and learn more.

Did You Know?

The rainbow flag, first designed by artist Gilbert Baker in 1978, has become one of the most widely recognised symbols of LGBTQ+ pride and inclusion. Different versions of the flag have since been developed to reflect the diversity of the LGBTQ+ community while maintaining its message of hope, visibility and belonging.

Real-Life Example

When Priya attended her first Pride event, she expected loud music and colourful celebrations.

She found those—but she also found something unexpected.

Alongside the celebrations were information stalls, support organisations, mental health charities and families walking together in support of their loved ones.

She later reflected,

"I realised Pride wasn't about standing out. It was about finally feeling that I didn't have to hide."

For many people, Pride is less about celebration itself and more about experiencing acceptance, sometimes for the very first time.

Reflection Questions

Take a few moments to reflect:

- Before reading this article, what did Pride mean to you?

Has learning about LGBTQ+ history changed your perspective?

Why might visibility and representation matter for someone's wellbeing?

How can understanding history help create more inclusive communities today?

Practical Ways to Support Inclusion

Learn about LGBTQ+ history from reliable sources.

Challenge stereotypes respectfully when you encounter them.

Avoid making assumptions about people's identities or relationships.

Support inclusive language in your workplace, school or community.

Listen to the experiences of LGBTQ+ people with openness and curiosity.

Celebrate diversity while recognising that everyone's journey is different.

Encourage environments where people feel safe to be themselves.

Remember that inclusion is demonstrated through everyday actions, not only during Pride Month.

Key Takeaways

LGBTQ+ history helps us understand the importance of equality, visibility and inclusion.

Pride commemorates both progress and the ongoing pursuit of equal rights.

The Stonewall Uprising was a significant moment in the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement.

Pride means different things to different people, and there is no single way to participate.

Allies play an important role in creating respectful and inclusive communities.

Learning from history helps build a more compassionate future.

Final Thoughts

LGBTQ+ history is, ultimately, a story about people.

It is a story of courage shown in difficult circumstances, of communities supporting one another, and of individuals choosing authenticity despite fear and uncertainty.

Pride reminds us that visibility, dignity and equality are not abstract ideas—they have real impacts on people's lives, relationships and mental wellbeing.

Whether you identify as LGBTQ+, are supporting someone you care about, or simply want to better understand the world around you, learning about this history can deepen empathy and strengthen inclusion.

As Harvey Milk said,

"It takes no compromise to give people their rights."

By understanding the past, we are better equipped to create a future in which every person—regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity—can feel respected, valued and free to live authentically.