

The effects of shame on the LGBTQ+ community



AND WHY WE NEED PRIDE

The history of Pride Month is long, complex, and multi-layered. Its origin as a protest for LGBTQ+ rights intersects with many other minorities' historical efforts to secure and/or maintain equality and equity for their communities.

But why is it called “Pride” to begin with?

To understand that choice, we first need to understand the stigmatization the LGBTQ+ community has been enduring for hundreds of years, and the primary emotion that stigma has caused for the community: **shame**.

Shame: a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety.

When people feel shame, some of the most common responses are:

Fear of rejection	Perfectionism	Defensiveness
Social withdrawal	Overcompensation	Desire for control
Isolation / Loneliness	People pleasing	Aggression

Shame also tells us that our value as individuals is linked to our actions; it says that we must earn our worth, a concept that dehumanizes us and the inherent value that comes with being alive. For the LGBTQ+ community, shame is a familiar and devastating part of life. This is because feelings of shame are often brought about by the experience of being stigmatized, to the point that stigma has been defined by Merriam-Webster as a “mark of shame.”

Stigma: a set of negative and unfair beliefs that a society or group of people has about something; a mark of shame or discredit

Stigma reduces the value of our humanity to the details of our lives, often just to one detail in particular. When we are placed in a stigmatized group by society, we are often unable to access many of the expected “normal” things that life has to offer people who aren't stigmatized, like a healthy home life, trusting relationships with those closest to us, equal access to professional advancement, or even the ability to travel freely.

The effects of stigmatization can be extremely harmful, and they often lead to issues including:

- Lack of access to care, resources, or even jobs
- Social isolation
- Estrangement from family and friends
- Blocked from religious comforts
- Disenfranchisement (relationships not deemed legitimate)
- Collective grief (response to violent attacks on the community)

...and, obviously, feelings of shame.

So, what does this have to do with Pride?

Shame is allowed to run rampant when paired with silence and isolation. Clinically recommended strategies for coping with stigma and shame focus heavily on breaking through that isolation, celebrating your inherent, unconditional value as a person, and spending time with those who do not shame you for who you are.

How to combat shame

Practicing self-compassion

Connecting with trusted others

Embracing vulnerability and authenticity

Expressing pride in yourself and acknowledging your worth

"The poison was shame, and the antidote is pride."

- L. Craig Schoonmaker

Thus, the movement for LGBTQ+ rights, freedoms, and recognition was given its name, Pride, in answer to the shame imposed on the community for so long.

The late L. Craig Schoonmaker, a lifelong activist who actively participated in the naming of Pride in the 70's, told the Allusionist in 2015:

"People did not have power then; even now, we only have some. But **anyone can have pride in themselves, and that would make them happier as people, and produce the movement likely to produce change.**

Pause for a Beat

- What are some examples of things you've heard that shame the LGBTQ+ community?
- For LGBTQ+ readers: Shame can hide in the smallest of corners. Are there things you feel ashamed of, even if you don't necessarily notice them daily?
- For LGBTQ+ allies: how can you remind your LGBTQ+ family members and friends of their worth, not despite their identity or sexuality, but because of its role in who they are as a person?

If you or someone you know is a member of the LGBTQ+ community and is in crisis, contact the Trevor Project's crisis hotline at 1-866-488-7386 or online at www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help.