

# Commentary: Pride, mental health and being an ally

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SITA-MARIE PILLAY

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“An ally is an active job. It isn't enough to be passive support; one must remember to do the work,” writes Sita-Marie Pillay.

The time is Pride! June is the month to celebrate people in the LBGTQAI+ community!

While we have joy and celebrate love, rainbows everywhere, we must also acknowledge this community's hardship and be mindful of how far we've come.

The Compton's Cafeteria Riot 1966 set off LBGTQAI+ liberation rights with an unmatched boom in trans women and drag queens standing up against police brutality in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco. From there, the Stonewall riots for gay liberation took place over days in 1969 following a police raid in New York. The first Pride marches were held in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles following Stonewall, and while there were some setbacks, such as a lack of representation of transgender individuals and people of color, strength and visibility came from these marches.

We have come a long way in the means of liberation and understanding of gay rights in the United States; however, we have a long way to go. Across many states, people cannot talk about their identities in schools and towns. Some states' administrators continue to emphasize the "don't say gay" law, which silences identities.

As a result, people are getting persecuted and killed for being authentic and having Pride. Guardians and healthcare workers across fields are told they can't protect their youth. The rates at which people are attacked for identifying as part of the LBGTQAI+ community are staggering, affecting youth and adults.

In addition, mental health in the Queer community continues to struggle, and isolation is the number one stressor. Those who identify as Queer and lack community support find themselves alone, mentally, emotionally, and physically unsafe. Youth identifying as Queer are four times more likely to experience victimization and violence. They are also inherently prone to higher suicide risk because of how they are stigmatized and mistreated by society, meaning they are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their non-LBGTQAI+ peers.

In my work as a psychologist, I have seen many individuals who suffer from feelings of isolation because of their gender or sexual orientation identity. Feelings of not being heard by their families and being told their identities are too complicated. Continuing to "dead name" or encouraging closeted behavior can be harmful emotionally and psychologically. These

feelings affect adults and youth and later lead to feelings of inadequacy, self-harm, and thoughts of suicide. These concerns for the Queer community regarding mental and emotional wellness are why we celebrate Pride at the Hanna Community Mental Health Hub.

If you don't identify as part of the Queer community, celebrating Pride Month can be a month to further your role as an ally. Honoring pronouns is a great start. Identities are valid! However, an ally is an active job. It isn't enough to be passive support; one must remember to do the work. Recognize how your words and experiences affect others, lift those voices struggling to be heard, be mindful of how you show up to space, and educate yourself.

Consider Pride month as your call to action as an ally. We can't all be marching with the masses, but we can be humble, uplift others when possible, and make the extra effort to introduce ourselves inclusively. Pride month can be an opportunity for growth and wellness for all who identify as LBGTQAI+ and allies.

Since starting my position as a post-doctoral fellow at the Hub, I have continued my support of the LBGTQAI+ in Sonoma County. My team and I continue the message of inclusivity and acceptance. We hope to have space at the next Sonoma Pride to show where we stand in our statement of care.

*Sita-Marie Pillay, Psy.D., M.A., is a member of the Community Mental Health Hub team at Hanna Center.*