

## **We're Here, We're Queer, Can We Go Home Now, Please?**

### Surviving the Burnout of a Loud and Proud Month

By Milo Sanders

*Some names have been changed for privacy.*

The first Pride was a riot. The Stonewall Riots began June 28, 1969 with the shout of Stormé DeLarverie as she was being put in handcuffs: “Why don’t you guys do something?” The voices of those first protesters echo through the years each June as both a celebration and a continued protest. Pride parades have long been part of the day, with other events often planned throughout the month, including picnics, drag brunches and bar crawls. Many of these events are based on loud group activities that grow each year as LGBTQ rights gains more traction among the general populace; though the colors, the noise and the crush of people are welcome, they can be overstimulating and overwhelming. Introverts find this to be true more than their extroverted counterparts, who thrive in the crowds. Queer introverts can struggle between celebrating themselves and continuing to fight for their right to exist while also respecting their need for alone time and introspection. How do they manage these conflicting interests without damaging their wellbeing? Lucia Rivero, Laura Morgan and Sheila Loesch, three self-proclaimed introverts and members of the queer community, weigh in on how they manage the challenges of Pride month.

#### “Stealth Queer”

Lucia Rivero, an assistant professor at a Boston-area college, hasn’t been “out and proud” most of their life. Rather, they grew up in a conservative time to a “repressive” family where they didn’t feel able to explore their identity. “I never thought I could be queer, even though the signs were all there,” they said with a little bit of a laugh. Over the years, as Rivero grew into adulthood and the discussion about queer rights became louder and more laws passed for equality, they’ve felt the confidence to explore their true self. But even now, they consider themselves a “stealth queer.” Their need to be visible in the community personally isn’t as strong now that they’ve come to terms with their identity. But that doesn’t stop Rivero from celebrating. They know that Pride as an event is crucial to the community and still *needs* to be loud. Rivero remembers a time, not many years ago, when “queer” was a slur, and companies like Target weren’t willing to sell rainbow apparel in the month of June. “I know we still have a long way to go, but I’m okay with the noise because it’s a sign of [queerness] being part of the conversation,” they said. They make a point to attend one Pride event each year. They join family members and friends who need the visibility to encourage their own self-discovery. Then, to balance out the noise and the busyness, Rivero spends the rest of their time in solitude or in small groups. Sometimes they hang with friends and watch queer movies. This year, they spent the weekend of Pride in New Hampshire. They participated in classic introvert activities like reading and enjoying nature. “I’m doing what I need to take care of myself,” they said.

## Attending the Parade

Laura Morgan doesn't usually choose to celebrate vocally during the month of June, but she observes it as an important part of her cultural history. "Pride is an important time for me to reflect on the history of Pride and to remember that there is a community that came before me and a community that I'm in right now and a community that will come after me." This year, despite some trepidation, she attended the Seattle Pride Parade, an event established in 1977 and that in recent years has garnered crowds of over 300,000. Her strategy to not getting overwhelmed was going with her girlfriend and her polycule. "I had more fun than I thought I would because I was with a small group of people that I know and trust." They also were able to leave the parade early, and Laura could spend the rest of the day recharging in a quiet space. Like Rivera, Morgan grew up in a conservative community and came to accept her queerness later as an adult. As a result, she struggles with knowing when she's being just introverted or hiding her identity. This is especially hard living in a "red" state, where prejudice is still prevalent and voices against the queer community are loud in the news.

In the end, she thinks the difference between social anxiety and the fear of being treated differently is about intent. "If I'm part of a conversation where I want to say something that would out me, if I notice that I'm not saying it because that means I would be outed, that is the closeted stuff." Around friends, she's able to speak up, but not in all situations. And it's not just in speaking that one can be loud or quiet. While Morgan appreciates that many queer people enjoy dressing up in loud colors and unusual styles, that's not her aesthetic. Instead, she finds that wearing rainbow socks or keeping rainbow flags among her possessions is a quieter way to signal her identity without having to be "flashy." It's a difficult balance between being proud and being quiet that she still hasn't quite figured out yet, but she's working on it. The community that will come after her needs all kinds of representation, not just the people who wear bright colors year round.

## Gay New Year

Sheila Loesch, on the other hand, felt the need to be overly loud and proud when she came out to compensate for what she sees as internalized homophobia. Then, in later years, she swung the other way again. A freelance writer and editor from the Seattle area, Loesch approaches Pride not simply as an event but as a time of reflection and redirection. Now she centers her personal needs without compromise, viewing Pride as a kind of "gay New Year." She asks herself, "Have I really been living to all of my gay, happy, queer dreams?" And if she hasn't, well, it's time to recalibrate, and she has 12 more months to focus on her goals. Loesch said that what makes Pride most overwhelming is the guesswork—how to interact with people, and what groups to

attend events with. She's found that volunteering at a booth is a great solution for her introversion. Behind the table, she has a designated place to be and designated people to talk to. But even when it gets too be too much, the very act of celebrating is another form of self-care. "There have been years where I haven't celebrated, and then I'm always sad afterward," she admitted. She focuses on smaller Pride events in her area instead of the large Pride parade in Seattle proper to keep from getting overstimulated. This year she chose to attend an inaugural Pride celebration in her hometown. "I loved it.... It was so cute." She mentioned the joy of being able to see younger people exploring themselves without fear at Pride events.

### Tips for Introverts

Whether it's feeling the freedom to leave an event early, choosing smaller venues or avoiding them altogether, introverts have long put the onus on themselves to know their own limits and how to deal with the overstimulation that events like Pride can bring. In fact, Loesch says that she always knows her limits and makes sure she doesn't put herself in situations where she might be overwhelmed. But it doesn't need to all be on her or introverts like her. It doesn't take much for others to be aware and considerate. In recent years, "quiet areas" have appeared at large events for those who need to de-stim and decompress, for example at Seattle's Pride in the Park, a family-friendly event held at Volunteer Park. A shaded and fenced-off area was denoted for attendees with sensory issues, set off in a different area of the park than the entertainment stages and the majority of the booths. Loesch appreciates the appearance of these—they're not meant specifically for introverts, but introverts are welcome to take refuge in them. In addition, Loesch said extroverts should respect others' needs and not force introverts to celebrate when they're tapped out. Sometimes it's hard for introverts to realize or speak up when they've reached empty. So when they do ask for space, it's especially important to listen. "If [introverts] say, 'I'm gonna call it a night. I know it's only nine p.m. but I'm going to call it a night.' Don't say, 'No, you gotta stay out! We gotta stay out really late!' That's not cool," Loesch said as an example. Another way to encourage introverts to participate is creating events with planned activities. Morgan suggested a queer book club, a crafting meetup or a hiking group, things that foster natural conversation over small talk.

### Inclusion Means All

Rivero also stresses the importance of respect but from a different aspect. "The progress isn't linear," they noted. They've seen gatekeeping in the queer community recently. This year specifically, there was an outcry on social media about people showing up to Pride who didn't "belong." Too many couples—or even just one person in a group—found themselves turned away from events because they passed as heterosexual. But a person's perceived sexuality or

gender shouldn't prevent them from celebrating Pride. That's the antithesis of what the gay civil rights movement is all about.

Even though queer people have more rights than ever before in the U.S., it's not the time to be silent. The 2024 election sees a lot of transgender issues coming up for debate yet again, including restricting gender-affirming care and President-elect Donald Trump's promises to dismantle Title IX's inclusion of gender identity. Pride is a celebration, but it's also still a protest. Introverts can get overstimulated, but with some strategies in place, they can still participate in this important month. They may not be literally noisy, but they can use social media or other text-based forms of communication to promote the cause and make noise of a different kind. Small acts of support, even just wearing a flag pin, can mean a lot to someone who is feeling alone in their journey of self-discovery. They can be there for one-on-one discussions and step away from groups for a moment when the social pressures mount. There are so many ways to be "loud and proud." Ultimately, it's about inclusion and respect. From allies to introverts, from transgender people to those still questioning, it's vital to let everyone feel welcome at Pride events. •