Beyond Tokenism: Embedding the spirit of pride in our everyday

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What is the spirit of pride?

> "As long as gay people don't have their rights all across America, there is no reason for celebration" - Marsha P. Johnson

It's important to remember that pride is about both celebration - by LGBTQIA+ people and allies - of their identities, communities, humanity, brilliance, joy, achievement, resilience, **and** about protest against the violence, oppression, marginalisation, and invisibilisation LGBTQIA+ communities continue to face.

[Image description: A black and white image of Marsha P. Johnson and another LGBTQ+ activist at a protest.]

The origins of Pride are rooted in protest and resistance against brutal injustice and violence against LGBTQIA+ folks - like the Stonewalls Riots in 1969 led by Trans women and Femmes of Colour fighting back against another violent police raid at the Stonewall Inn in NYC. Embedding the spirit of pride in our everyday means embedding the **full** spirit of Pride in our organisations in solidarity with and celebration of our LGBTQIA+ colleagues.

[Image description: People at a corporate Pride event smile and wave rainbow flags.]

What is tokenism?

> The practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort in service of equity for members of a marginalised community, often centered on "appearing" to do the right thing with the focus of avoiding criticism and gaining praise.

The practice of making no more than a token effort or gesture often shows up if we focus merely on representation or singularly on celebration. This, alone, ultimately fails to disrupt the systems which marginalise and oppress LGBTQIA+ colleagues - and benefit non-LGBTQIA+ colleagues.

Representation and celebration are of course important - but they require very little from non-LGBTQIA+ folks: to create meaningful equity and inclusion we have to go beyond tokenism. What follows are some fundamental ways we can do just that.

Dos & Don'ts - The big picture

DO - Intersectionality

> The LGBTQIA+ community is not monolithic - it is a large and diverse community of many *communities*.

While the acronym is useful in identifying the shared experience of folks who are marginalised because of their gender identity and/or romantic/sexual attraction, it's crucial to also recognise the broadly different identities and groups *within* the wider community.

For example: South-east Asian Lesbian Women face heterosexism that has both gendered *and racialised dimensions.* That means the marginalisation they experience is specific and unique in that racism, sexism and heterosexism come together to produce *compounded* oppression, inequity and violence.

"There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives."
- Audre Lorde

…. and when we focus on struggles as "singular" - or disconnected - we end up prioritising our default within that community; that is, those who experience heterosexism or cissexism but don't experience other forms of systemic oppression; for example disablism, Islamophobia or classism.

When we fail to think about and practice intersectionality in our efforts for LGBTQIA+ solidarity, we end up further marginalising those we say we are seeking to support - and the most vulnerable at that.

DON'T - Pinkwashing

> Pinkwashing describes the process by which institutions, organisations or even governments profess to support LGBTQIA+ folks in order to *appear* progressive, modern and tolerant in order to benefit from that positive positioning in global markets and across geo-political terrains.

For example, take Ethical Oil's "Opec hates Gays'' campaign for the Keystone XL Pipeline which sought to Transport Canadian oil through the USA. The campaign used LGBTQIA+ rights - and age-old Islamaphobic narratives - in an attempt to bolster legitimacy and gain support for a profit oriented project which would have deeply harmed some of the most vulnerable communities in Canada.

The proposed 2,735-kilometre pipeline project by Calgary-based TransCanada would carry roughly 800,000 barrels of oil a day from Alberta to the gulf of Mexico, passing through Indigenous territories in Montana, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma. The pipeline was fiercely opposed by Indigenous communities as well as non-indigenous activists on account of the catastrophic impacts on the indigenous communities, environment and wildlife.

To divert attention away from this criticism, the campaign pointed to examples of heterosexism and cissexism in OPEC nations (mostly Muslim majority countries in Southwest Asia and North Africa) and examples of progress on LGBTQIA+ rights in Canada to position Canadian oil as "ethical" and "queer friendly" and OPEC oil as "unethical", "homophobic" and "tyrannical". This ultimately appropriated LGBTQIA+ communities for political and economic gain. The campaign also conveniently erased indigenous LGBTQIA+ folks in Canada who would have been severely negatively impacted by the proposed pipeline.

We also see pinkwashing practiced when large corporations and businesses make use of LGBTQIA+ symbols and terminology in branding and marketing in order to make profits. Capitalising on opportunities to embed solidarity is not solidarity.

One of the ways we see organisations try to combat this is by donating profits of merchandise or products using the Pride colours and flag. You might say, money going to LGBTQIA+ charities is a good thing, right? In the abstract, yes. But taken in aggregate, this creates a context of so-called slacktivism: giving brands and consumers a low-effort/low-stakes/no-risk way to support equity and inclusion for marginalised communities. And slacktivism doesn't embed the true spirit of Pride in our every day. So - we aren't saying don't donate money to LGBTQIA+ charities doing work to support LGBTQIA+ communities - but we are saying, go further, in our every day. **Read more about how to shift your allyship efforts into solidarity here**.

Do's & don'ts - the nuts and bolts

Disclaimer : we offer this as a foundational set of dos and don'ts rather than an exhaustive list. We invite you to use this list to begin or enhance your work to embed Solidarity for LGBTQIA+ folks every day in your organisation.

DO

1. Make it a policy to introduce yourself with your pronouns in all meetings with new people even when your Trans or Non-binary colleague(s) aren't around. In addition, listen to the needs of these colleagues around what timeline they feel comfortable sharing their own pronouns.

2. Try hard to get your colleagues' pronouns correct when referring to them. If you mess up, apologise, correct yourself, and move on. Overemphasising creates burden for Non-binary and Trans folks.

3. Ensure you and your team put pronouns in your email signatures and all internal and external information where names are shared - to further normalise sharing pronoun information. Explain to those unfamiliar with sharing pronouns the importance of this by emphasising the impact of misgendering people.

4. Ensure your workplace and any in-person work events have easy access to gender neutral toilets. If you don't have these already - just amend your signage! Without gender neutral toilets you put Trans and Non-binary folk at risk of violence and indignity.

5. When running events - where possible - do choose venues in known LGBTQIA+ friendly bars/restaurants/areas, to prioritise the safety of LGBTQIA+ folks.

6. Ensure any information gathering forms/surveys at your organisation give people the option to share their gender identity free-form, rather than being limited to only 'Male' or 'Female' or 'other'.

7. When discussing romantic relationships status, use the language of partner(s) to avoid assumptions of heteronormativity and cisnormativity.

8. Amplify LGBTQIA+ people's voices, stories and experiences to focus on those communities who are often invisibilised. For example, during International Women's Day events amplify the experiences of Trans Women of Colour to unequivocally recognise Trans Women as Women and resist the default of prioritising cisgender heterosexual White Women.

9. Pay attention to and recognise the impact of the ways state laws/policies and the global media are demonising LGBTQIA+ communities and making life more hostile to them every day.

10. Create spaces for communities within the LGBTQIA+ community in your organisation to come together to share, decompress and feel greater solidarity and safety. But do not expect this space to be the solution to cissexism or heterosexism in your organisation.

11. Ask your LGBTQIA+ colleagues about their experiences at your organisation through anonymised staff surveys and voluntary interviews/focus groups specifically with those from these communities who are comfortable sharing their experiences and insights, to triangulate this data.
    - Ensure the questions you are posing are open and have the breadth to really capture what it feels like for folks within these communities to experience the everyday culture at your organisation in all areas of the work you do and your internal infrastructure.

12. Actively seek to recruit LGBTQIA+ folks into your organisation through partnering with LGBTQIA+ employee networks and organisations, posting your role openings on job boards that focus on the LGBTQIA+ community, such as Pink Jobs, LGBTConnect or the Transgender Job Bank, and join LGBTQIA+ recruitment events.

    - And, actively interrogate how and where negative narratives and discourses about LGBTQIA+ folks could play out in your recruitment processes to prevent equity for candidates.

13. Create a transitioning at work policy and a road map for supporting Trans employees transitioning at work.

    - Think about: accessing entitlements and considerations, guidelines for line managers, internal comms, updating employee records and profiles and remember - the timescales, activity and communication should be led by the choices of the person transitioning.

14. Ensure that the wording of employee benefits such as health insurance does not make these benefits exclusive to heterosexual and cisgender folks and provides benefits specifically for the needs of Transgender employees. If employees experience different tax treatment from other employees for their benefits, then compensate them for that.

15. Embed your commitment to LGBTQIA+ equity, inclusion and belonging within and through your communications, internal and external and ensure the examples and images you use don't perpetuate stereotypes.

16. Be prepared to challenge homophobic and transphobic ideas and behaviours amongst colleagues and peers, such as that Trans women shouldn't play sports alongside cis Women or that [gender neutral bathrooms are dangerous for cis Women](#) or that Bisexual folks as 'greedy' or 'indecisive'.

    - Be ready to have challenging, compassionate and focussed discussions with others to share with them why such ideas are inequitable, exclusionary and further cissexism.

17. If arranging travel for Trans or Non-binary colleagues - ask what modes of travel they would prefer and do call ahead and ensure that hotels have their correct name to call them by at check-in. You can also do the same regarding name and pronouns for reception at your workplace and at work events.

18. Recognise heterosexism as "your issue" if you are heterosexual; heterosexism affords benefits, power and privileges to heterosexual folks and is therefore their responsibility to disrupt it.

19. Recognise cissexism as "your issue" if you are cis-gender; cissexism affords benefits, power and privileges to heterosexual folks and is therefore their responsibility to disrupt it.

20. Be ready to put something on the line; allyship and solidarity for LGBTQIA+ ultimately has to be disruptive - disruptive of the systems that marginalise these communities. And that means it has to cost something to non LGBTQIA+ folks. If

it doesn't, then it's ultimately going to be perpetuating systems, and the negative outcomes for LGBTQIA+ colleagues.

21. Acknowledge where key cultural phenomenon, language, etc. comes from Trans, Non-binary, etc. communities - the appropriation of LGBTQIA+ culture and practices by heterosexual and cisgender folks harms LGBTQIA+ people and erases their identities and cultures.

22. Read and engage with cultural outputs created by LGBTQIA+ people (art, books, performances, TV shows, etc.)

DON'T

1. Use the language of "tolerance" in reference to LGBTQIA+ folks and their identities; tolerance suggests 'putting up with' or suffering some 'thing' we dislike or disagree with. This positions LGBTQIA+ folks as abnormal and perpetuates cisnormativity and heteronormativity.

2. Assume someone's gender identity or sexual/romantic orientation is visible or always static; gender expression is unique and subjective.

3. Assume that there are no LGBTQIA+ folks in your organisation/department/team - folks may not want or feel safe to share their identity with you or within your organisation/department/team.

    a. Ask yourself what your organisation/ department/team policies, practices and culture do to create equity, inclusion and belonging for LGBTQIA+ folks so that the environment actively and explicitly welcomes and prioritises them?

4. Disclose or "out" LGBTQIA+ people's identity if they have shared with you in confidence.

5. Ask LGBTQIA+ folks invasive questions that are overly personal or intimate, like when or how did they "know" who they are, when did they tell their parents, how do they have sex, or which body parts do they have or not have. We don't ask this of cisgender or heterosexual folks because we assume these identities are normative.

6. Lower your voice when discussing LGBTQIA+ identities, lives, stories, histories, challenges or experiences - this communicates there is something taboo being discussed.

7. Police expression of gender or sexuality through expectations of people's choice of dress, their speech/expression or how they move their bodies.

8. Position discussing sexual/romantic orientation and identities at work as unprofessional - we don't see heterosexual people frowned upon or disciplined for announcing weddings or naming their partner at work.

9. Trivialise or delegitimise LGBTQIA+ identities - take for example the language of "bromance" instead of "friendship" to describe a platonic friendship between two men. The need to demarcate that this is a "not-gay" relationship between two men is rooted in heterosexism and furthers the idea that being gay is wrong and abnormal.

10. Use heteronormative language to address groups internally or externally; instead of "ladies and gents" or "guys", simply use "folks", "everyone" or "all" for example.

11. Position LGBTQIA+ solidarity, equity and rights as being led by the West/ countries in the Global North. This feeds into and is informed by colonialist narratives and erases the colonial origins of both heterosexism and cissexim as systems.

    - This also perpetuates the idea that LGBTQIA+ people are by default safer and less marginalised within societies in the Global North, which diminishes the everyday violence and inequities folks do experience and minimises the responsibility we have to prioritise equity and inclusion for LGBTQIA+ folks wherever our organisations are based.

    - Assume or position Trans and Non-binary identity as either new or Western. Many cultures around the world have long recognised more than two gender identities. For example, Hijra in India are officially accepted as a third gender, as are two-spirit people in indigenous North American nations. And we can go far back in history and see evidence of societies that culturally recognised more than two genders - in Mesopotamian, Babylonian and Akkadian civilisations.

12. Assume that people of faith are not or cannot be LGBTQIA+.

13. Focus on the business case for including or centering LGBTQIA+ people as employees, clients or customers. LGBTQIA+ people deserve equity, inclusion, belonging and justice because they are human beings not because they are good for business.

14. Ask or expect LGBTQIA+ people to explain their identities, the oppression they experience or to be the start and end point in informing heterosexual and cisgender folks about what they should "do"; solidarity requires people who are for example, not Lesbians - i.e. heterosexual folks as well as Gay Men - to invest in understanding how heterosexism towards Lesbians manifests in ourselves and in the world.

15. Only acknowledge the histories of struggle and protest of the LGBTQIA+ communities on "relevant days'' (i.e. during Pride month).

    a. For example, when discussing 'leadership' - why not profile Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera? (Two leading Trans activists that were instrumental in the Stonewall Rebellion).

16. Wait for overt issues of injustice, inequity or violence against LGBTQIA+ people to occur before you act - be proactive in practicing solidarity and allyship.

17. Measure your organisation's progress on equity and inclusion for LGBTQIA+ folks on quotas and targets alone - diversity doesn't equal or equate to inclusion and bringing LGBTQIA+ folks into the organisation to meet a quota results in tokenistic hiring practices.

18. Assume people have certain characteristics because of their sexual orientation.

19. Only profile examples of romantic relationships that are heterosexual - pay close attention to this in internal comms and external marketing, advertising and campaigns.

20. **Be afraid to make mistakes.** we can't create equity and inclusion for LGBTQIA+ colleagues when we priorite the comfort of cisgender and heterosexual folks over the safety and belonging of LGBTQIA+ people. We will make mistakes and that is pretty unavoidable - but we can learn to do better by bringing openness and commitment to our solidarity.

Resources

- Article: [A Map of Gender Diverse Cultures](#)
- Resource: *[FAQs about Transgender People](#)*
- Article: *[Mapping the Anti-Trans Laws Sweeping America: 'A war on 100 fronts'](#)*
- Article: *[The Disingenuous Logic of Transphobic Bathroom Laws](#)*
- Article: *[Genders, Bodies, Politics](#)*
- Video: *[Your Behavior Creates Your Gender](#)*
- Video: *[Who is Allowed to be a Victim?](#)*
- *Video: [What's it like to be intersex?](#)*
- *Video: [Things not to Say to a Non-binary Person](#)*
- *Video: [The urgent need for compassion with Alok Vaid-Menon](#)*
- Podcast episode: [Black Trans Lives Matter](#)
- Podcast: [Gender Reveal](#)
- Podcast: [QueerWOC: The podcast](#)

Glossary

Remember that LGBTQIA+ stands for LGBTTQQIA+:

- **L**esbian
- **G**ay
- **B**isexual
- **T**ransgender
- **T**wo-Spirit
- **Q**ueer
- **Q**uestioning
- **I**ntersex
- **A**sexual
- **+** those who are not captured within the acronym but who are part of this community, including but not limited to those who are;
  - \+ Polyamorous
  - \+ Pansexual
  - \+ Agender
  - \+ Gender Queer
  - \+ Gender Variant
  - \+ Pangender
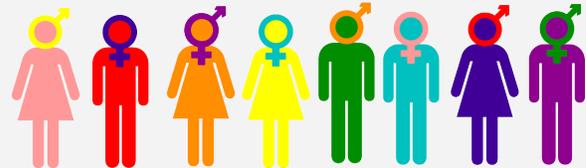
*Remember: gender identity and sexual orientation are different aspects of our identity. One is how we understand our gender, the other is who we are attracted to. Because of this, people could align with multiple of the terms on this list simultaneously.

Sex	- The sex characteristics we're born with and develop. These are chemical and anatomical. They include our genitalia, chromosomes, and secondary sex characteristics we develop during puberty. - Sex is often categorised as Male or Female but not all people's sex characteristics fit entirely into one of these categories. Intersex people have sex characteristics that are categorised as both Male and Female.
Gender	- Not biological - socially constructed. How we define our own gender. - The ways that we societally attribute characteristics (such as preferences, jobs, ways of dressing, etc.) to gender categories. This means gender can and does change over time - because, as a society, how we attribute characteristics to gender categories shifts.

Sexual rientation	A person's identity in relation to the gender(s) to which they are typically attracted- sexually, romantically, and/or emotionally.
Cisgender	People whose gender identity corresponds with the sex they were assigned at birth.
Trangender[1]	People whose gender identity does not correspond with the sex they were assigned at birth.
Non-binary	People that do not identify with the binary gender identities of Man or Woman, solely. ● Their gender identity could incorporate aspects of both Man and Woman or could sit entirely outside of both these categories.
Lesbian	Term used to describe a Woman/Women who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation toward Women.
Gay	Term used to describe a person who has a romantic and/or sexual orientation toward people of the same gender. ● Generally usually used to describe Men who have romantic and/or sexual orientation towards Men.
Bisexual	People who are attracted — romantically and/or sexually — to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degre.
Queer	The term used to be a negative slur used by cisgender and heterosexual folks to position LGBTQIA+ people as "strange" and "abnormal". It has been reclaimed by LGBTQIA+ folks to be used; ● As an umbrella term to describe the community of identities which are beyond the binary of cisgender and hetereosexual. ● To describe romantic/sexual identities beyond heterosexuality.
Intersex	Intersex people are individuals born with any of several sex characteristics including chromosome patterns, gonads, or genitals that do not fit typical binary notions of Male or Female bodies.
Asexual	People who experience little or no sexual attraction. ● Also sometimes referred to as "Ace" (eg "I am ace")

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[1] Trans, Non-binary, gender non-conforming and genderfluid are terms that can mean different things to different people. For this reason, the definitions we share should be understood as broad and you should always be led by how someone defines their own identity.

	● Should not be confused with celibacy. Celibacy is a choice to abstain from sex, whereas for some asexuality is a lack of much, or any, sexual attraction. ● Asexuality is a spectrum including grey sexual or grey-ace people: folks who may experience sexual attraction very rarely or only under specific circumstances.
Gender-non conforming/ Genderfluid	This is a catch-all term for anyone whose gender identity doesn't 'conform' to the status quo - Man and Woman - and may not be fixed.
Cissexism	The system of inequity that negatively targets anybody who is not cisgender (which is predominantly but not exclusively Transgender and Non-binary people) and affords power, resources and normativity to cisgender people. ● We use the term 'system' because like any other system - cissexism has a range of micro and macro component parts that generate the negative outcomes for Trans and Non-binary people we see accross our society. Some of these components are: laws, policies, processes, institutions, prevailing media narratives and negative prejudicial ideas about Trans and Non-binary identity.
Heterosexism	The system of inequity that negatively targets anybody who is not heterosexual (which is predominantly but not exclusively gay, lesbian, bisexual and pansexual people) and affords power, resource and normativity to heterosexual people. ● We use the term system, for the same reasons as above
Cis-normative	Ways our societal and organisational cultures position being cis and what cis people do, be, or have as normal.
Hetero-normative	Ways our societal and organisational cultures position being heterosexual and what heterosexual people do, be, have as normal.
Pronouns	How we refer to one another in speech - when not using names. This is gendered in the English language. ● Examples: he, him, she, her, they, them. ● People may be comfortable being referred to by a variety of pronouns. For example - they may state their pronouns as she *and* they. ● 'They'/'them' pronouns are often, though not exclusively, associated with Non-binary gender identity.