

Happy Pride Month!

Now that June is here, and stores and streets alike have become much more colorful, those of us who are questioning their Sexuality or Gender Identity (or who are still in the closet) might be feeling more pressure to make a huge decision: coming out. A large portion of Queer representation in popular media tends to put quite a bit of focus on this, both in terms of the process of coming out, and the feelings and pressure that others may put on you to define your Sexuality, Gender, etc.

Certainly, during Pride Month, when the Queer community is much more visible, many more people will be thinking about their own Gender and Sexuality, and wondering if it may be time to make that crucial decision. Social media is filled with influencers and celebrities and friends alike coming out, sharing their Gender Identity and Sexuality with the world. Commercials are oversaturated with messages encouraging you to celebrate your identity by purchasing pride merchandise or sticking a pronoun pin on your backpack, and TV shows and books surrounding the LGBTQ+ experience almost always involve coming out in some form or another as part of the plot. The pressure to find your identity and broadcast to the world is a message that gets churned out everywhere, and during Pride Month, the message is especially glaring. While coming out can be an exciting opportunity to celebrate yourself and your community, I'd like to acknowledge that it is not always safe for everyone in the Queer community to come out.

In communities where LGBTQ+ issues are ignored or actively shunned, or in homes where Queer people might be reliant on people who may not be supportive of their identities, **coming out might pose a threat to one's safety.** People who are not yet comfortable with their Sexuality, Gender, or other aspects of their identity may feel pressure to conform and fit

themselves into a label in order to come out - but the truth is there is never any pressure to come out. Coming out can be an exciting decision, but it is also deeply personal. How you choose to identify and who you choose to share that identity with is your decision, and your decision alone. You may decide to come out to everyone in your life, or you may decide not to come out at all. You might even only come out to one person. But no matter what, you are always a part of the LGBTQ+ community, and you are always welcome in the community. Your identity is valid, regardless of whether or not you've announced it to anyone. You are not any less Queer, any less valid, or any less *yourself*.

In a time where we put pressure on ourselves to find certain niches and communities to land in, and where social media pressures you to fit as many aspects of yourself as possible into a neat label, not coming out might feel like you are doing yourself and the community a disservice, but that is not at all the case. It is a big decision, so take your time. Keep yourself safe, and most importantly, be gentle with yourself.

Have a wonderful rest of your Pride Month, no matter where you are in the process.

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ZCenter aims to end sexual violence, mobilize and educate the public, and support survivors of sexual assault. Our blog addresses issues related to ending oppression and violence, since all oppression and violence are intersectional with sexual violence. All ZCenter blog posts are written by state certified staff, interns, and volunteers. For questions on authorship or content, please email info@zcenter.org.