

Becoming Visible: The LGBTQ Movement

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The LGBTQ movement has existed in some form for the entirety of human history; however, mainstream society refused to pay attention to it. The maturation of the LGBTQ movement in the 20th century was an expected response to centuries of marginalization by the church, state, and society. The prehistory of LGBTQ activism traces back to ancient Greece; however, it came to fruition in the 1960s in the United States. The LGBTQ movement strives for visibility because it advocates for full social equality and liberation from violence and discrimination.

The history of the modern LGBTQ liberation movement in the United States is considered to have started with the 1969 Stonewall Riots. In the 1960s, members of the community spent their free time and socialized in illegal bars that were often raided by police. June 28, 1969, marked the first time when people responded to the police violence with an open violent protest in a club called Stonewall located in Greenwich Village, New York (Morris, 2019). To honor the pivotal moment, pride celebrations around the world always take place in June.

The Stonewall Riots marked a pivotal moment in LGBTQ history, as it demonstrated that individuals were clearly fed up with their marginalized status in society. It is due to the influence of Stonewall that the gay liberation movement fully started in the 1970s. However, LGBTQ liberation was also clearly inspired by the achievements of the Civil Rights Movement for the freedom of African Americans (Morris, 2019). The 1960s was a decade that demonstrated the importance of human rights and the ability to fight for them, achieving results that were established in legislation, and the LGBTQ movement followed in the footsteps of the Civil

Rights Movement.

The 1970s saw the emergence of the full-blown LGBTQ Rights Movement in the United States. At the time, the first political organizations that supported the liberalization of LGBTQ rights were formed. Some prominent organizations of the time included the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and the Gay Activists' Alliance (Morris, 2019). These political groups, however, experienced problems with representation, as they were mostly led by gay men. Lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people were underrepresented in groups fighting for rights. Because of this, lesbians started to form their own political organizations based on the Civil Rights Movement. Mainstream feminist groups, such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) offered platforms for lesbian rights movements (Morris, 2019). Such dynamics established the lesbian rights movement as a part of not only the LGBTQ movement, but the feminist movement as well.

The fight for LGBTQ rights existed not only in the legal realm but also in the medical field. During the 1970s, homosexuality was considered a disease by the mainstream medical community, and many individuals were forced to undergo discriminatory treatment against their will. The protests against considering homosexuality a disease began years before the Stonewall Riots, but it was not until 1973 that the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the diagnostic manual (Morris, 2019). At the time, it was a significant step forward for the community. To honor the 50th anniversary of Stonewall, the American Psychiatric Association issued an apology for the discriminatory treatment of the LGBTQ community in June of 2019 (Trotta, 2019). This apology demonstrated a massive step forward, which was achieved by activists over the span of five decades.

The 1970s political movement for LGBTQ liberation achieved some success— including political representation—and increased the overall visibility of the community. However, the LGBTQ rights movement experienced a dramatic setback in the 1980s due to the AIDS epidemic that affected gay men to a large degree (Morris, 2019). The movement had to put the focus away from the development of civil rights, focusing on the mere survival of the individuals on the verge of death instead. Organizations like the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and Queer Nation brought attention to the expected treatment of AIDS (Morris, 2019). At the time, religious alt-right groups, which believed that AIDS was a punishment from God, became increasingly active, and the mainstream population supported them. Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush are blamed for the inactivity that led to the death of millions of Americans. LGBTQ marginalization was a large part of the failure to address epidemics in time. The epidemics were regulated only after Bill Clinton became the president of the United States. Challenges faced by LGBTQ movement during the 1980s because of the AIDS epidemic can be seen as a setback; however, they strengthened the community and made the movement more proactive.

The LGBTQ rights movement in western countries progressed in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. The 1990s was an era of growing mainstream representation. In the 2000s, countries started to recognize civil rights unions, beginning with the Netherlands in 2001. Throughout the 1990s and the 2000s, laws that protect workplace discrimination and other types of discrimination were introduced. In 2010, Iceland became the first country to recognize same-sex marriage and adoption laws followed shortly after. At last, the community had finally become viable. In 2015, same-sex marriages were legally recognized in the United States (Morris, 2019).

The 2010s saw a rise in internet activism which made it easier for LGBTQ activists to unite. The inclusion of transgender individuals has become the most important challenge of the LGBTQ movement in the 21st century. At the same time, the mainstream representation of LGBTQ people has reached its peak in media, politics, and the public sphere (Morris, 2019). The LGBTQ movement is visible because, in western countries, it is now a part of the mainstream culture, acknowledged not only by the members of the community, but also by the general public.

Despite the significant progress in LGBTQ rights protection that has been achieved in countries of the western world, the LGBTQ Rights Movement continues because the members of the community are still largely marginalized in countries around the world. In more than thirty percent of the world's countries, representatives of LGBTQ communities suffer from physical attacks, kidnappings, rapes, and murders (United Nations, 2019). Recently, it was revealed that the members of the community are killed after being hunted down in Chechnya, Russia (Kramer, 2019). Engagement in consensual same-sex relationships is the only reason for such prosecution to occur, which makes it notorious. In at least five countries where Sharia laws are the basis of the legislation, people are executed for same-sex relationships (United Nations, 2019). Even minors cannot escape public executions, which is demonstrated by the case of Mahmoud Asgari and Ayaz Marhoni, who were publicly killed in Iran at the age of 16 and 18 ("Protest at execution of Iranian teenagers", 2009). The scale to which LGBTQ individuals are prosecuted in many parts of the world is inhumane; therefore, it cannot be justified.

Countries often fail to protect individuals from discriminatory treatment in their private lives due to the absence of relevant laws, social stigma, and passivity on the matter. The discriminatory treatment that occurs in the private sphere includes discrimination in the

workplace, housing, and health care (United Nations, 2019). Discrimination is especially difficult for teenagers who identify as members of the LGBTQ community. These children often face complete isolation and misunderstanding and can be bullied in school. In the most extreme cases, the parents of the LGBTQ children may throw them out of schools. Discrimination may lead individuals to develop depression, which significantly increases the risk of suicide.

Criminalizing sexual relationships and denying LGBTQ individual rights are a gross violation of an individual's right to privacy and human rights in general. There are no objective reasons to deny human rights to LGBTQ individuals. The lack of support of LGBTQ rights by the state feeds the violence of extreme groups towards LGBTQ people (United Nations, 2019). Moreover, the lack of state and social support hurts the spread of the HIV epidemic, as marginalized individuals are less likely to seek treatment due to the fear of violence and discrimination after coming forward to a doctor.

To conclude, religion, culture, and tradition cannot justify the violation of LGBTQ rights. Every human being is entitled to the same human rights, regardless of their status. Identifying as LGBTQ is a social status that can be compared to race, sex, ethnicity, and religion. Protecting human rights is an inherent goal of any state. Given the fact that discrimination of LGBTQ individuals continues to exist in most countries around the world and reaches unbelievable levels of violence, the LGBTQ Rights Movement is as important to the Human Rights Movement as ever. The inspiring story of the LGBTQ movement in the 20th century, which led to the full legal recognition of LGBTQ individuals in almost 30 countries, gives hope that the movement will continue to thrive all over the world and put individuals out of danger, allowing them to enjoy the entire spectrum of human rights.

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