



# In-between the Identities: A Personal Reflection on Two Pride Parades in Spain and Turkey

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Accepted: 28 October 2023 / Published online: 2 November 2023  
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## Abstract

Pride parades, serving as platforms for celebrating diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, often operate within a society that upholds and reinforces heteronormative norms. This commentary intends to argue how these activities are shaped by the presence of restrictions and censorship and the prevalence of ignorance surrounding queer experiences. By conducting ethnographic observations at Pride parades in Turkey and Spain, I delve into participants' lived experiences within these contexts. This approach sheds light on Pride parades' positive and negative aspects. Through an analysis of the interplay between heteronormative influences, restrictions, censorship, and ignorance within the context of Pride parades, I aim to provide insight into the complexities and nuances that shape the experiences of queer individuals. This commentary contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced and the progress made in the ongoing struggle for queer liberation and acceptance.

**Keywords** Pride Parade · Turkey · Spain · Queer · Heteronormativity · Liberation

## Introduction

The combination of queer theory and activism has paved the way for numerous productions and discussions (Munoz, 2015; Rosqvist et al., 2020; Yates, 2015). In examining the interplay between action and identification within this multifaceted relationship with queer theory, we witness the transformation of daily life into a fertile ground for queer politics and intervention (Blasius, 1994; Puar, 2017; Tucker, 2009). This lens allows for visualizing performative acts and active involvement in Pride

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parade activism, influencing my perspective as I write this text. Notably, this approach constantly challenges traditional power structures across diverse geographies, daily life experiences, and cultural contexts, igniting new dialogues through varied examples. Similar to other realms of political struggle and activism, LGBTQ+ and activist groups offer individuals the chance to identify with LGBTQ+ characters, regardless of their sexual orientation. By doing so, they facilitate the exploration of a “truth” that exists outside the confines of heteronormativity, drawing from lived experiences encountered in everyday practices. Through this lens, we can fully comprehend the significance of Pride parade for the queer movement.

This text aims to go beyond merely highlighting the politics of homosexuality as a distinct entity alongside the norms of the heteronormative order. Instead, it seeks to challenge the norms, questioning their underlying assumptions. Therefore, rather than dismissing the negative connotations associated with the term “queer,” which lends its name to theory and activism, I aim to embrace these concepts and convey my observations through them. In this approach, I center my critique on the norms that construct and perpetuate differences, rejecting a system that merely questions the body, gender, desire, and gender expressions while maintaining the idea of difference.

## The Foundation of Concepts: Exploring the Core Ideas

Queer theory becomes evident not by its defining characteristics but rather by what it stands against (Butler, 2006; Jagose, 1996; Sumara & Davis, 1999). It opposes all forms of labeling on gender, sexual orientation, and sexual practices, thereby challenging any categories upon which identity and sexuality are constructed. While it interrogates the establishment and functioning of norms that dictate what is considered normal, its purpose is not to shift the marginalized to the center but to dismantle the very notion of a center.

By challenging binary structures of thought such as sex/gender, homosexuality/heterosexuality, and femininity/masculinity, which have heavily influenced our perceptions of gender and the expectations that accompany them, queer theory highlights that none of these identities on gender, gender expression, or sexual orientation are inherent or natural (Butler, 2006). Instead, they are historically, culturally, and socially constructed, inherently intertwined with power relations. Consequently, the preliminary inquiries of queer theory revolve around the construction of sexual identities, how these identities are organized, and how our identification with these identities enables and constrains us.

In this context, I aim to explore the impact of a heteronormative understanding on identity, identification, and the practice of reading queer within the framework of Pride parades. Drawing on ethnographic observations from Pride parades in Turkey and Spain, I examine how positive and negative Pride parades are influenced by restrictions, censorship, and ignorance rooted in a heteronormative mindset.

## Experiencing Dual Pride Parades: A Participant Observer's Perspective

Attending a Pride parade holds personal significance for me. It allows me to immerse myself in a space that celebrates and acknowledges diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. In this autoethnographic account, I aim to reflect on my observations and experiences at two recent Pride parades, delving into my own emotions, perceptions, and the broader cultural context.

As I arrived at the Pride parade in Sitges in Spain in July 2023, a kaleidoscope of colors greeted my eyes. Rainbow flags billowed in the air, and people of all ages and backgrounds filled the streets. The atmosphere was electric, brimming with anticipation and excitement. Music echoed through the air, creating a soundtrack of unity and empowerment. The sight of individuals embracing their identities, adorned in flamboyant outfits and expressive accessories, evoked a sense of Pride parade.

Walking through the crowded streets, I couldn't help but notice the diverse representation of the LGBTQ+ community. People from all walks of life were present – individuals of different ages, ethnicities, and gender expressions. It was a powerful reminder of the rich tapestry that makes up this community, a vivid demonstration of the beauty in the collective differences.

Conversations with fellow attendees allowed me to connect on a deeper level. Sharing personal stories of struggles, triumphs, and the journey toward self-acceptance created a sense of camaraderie and understanding. The event fostered a spirit of inclusivity and support, encouraging open dialogue about the challenges and the progress people strive for. Reflecting on my observations, it becomes evident that Pride parades serve as transformative spaces, enabling individuals to explore and embrace their authentic selves. They provide a platform for self-expression and solidarity, reinforcing the significance of visibility and acceptance. Witnessing the celebration of diverse identities within the LGBTQ+ community and the support from allies reminded me of people's progress while acknowledging the ongoing struggle for equality.

Moreover, this autoethnographic experience allowed me to situate my narrative within the broader cultural context. It highlighted the societal shifts and evolving attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community. Pride parades intersect where personal experiences intertwine with collective stories, collectively challenging societal norms and advocating for change. As the parade commenced, I marveled at the diverse representations on display. Floats adorned with empowering slogans and captivating performances showcased the creativity and resilience of our community. Cheers and applause erupted from the crowd as each group proudly marched forward, embracing their unique identities.

This year (2023), having a chance to attend two (different) Pride parades in two (different) countries can provide unique insights into the LGBTQ+ communities' struggles. Spain and Turkey, for instance, have distinct cultural and social contexts, which can significantly influence the experience of participating in their respective Pride parades. Spain is widely recognized for its progressive stance on LGBTQ+ rights, making it a popular destination for Pride parades celebrations. Pride marches in Spanish cities like Madrid and Barcelona are known for their vibrant and

inclusive atmosphere. The streets are filled with diverse people, including members of the LGBTQ+ community, their allies, and local politicians. The parades often feature colorful floats, music, and extravagant costumes, creating a festive and celebratory atmosphere. Spain's progressive laws and societal acceptance contribute to a sense of freedom and acceptance during these events. On the other hand, Turkey presents a different dynamic regarding LGBTQ+ rights. While there is an active LGBTQ+ community in Turkey, the country faces significant challenges regarding legal recognition and societal acceptance. Pride marches in Turkish cities like Istanbul and Ankara often face obstacles, including government restrictions and counterdemonstrations. Despite these challenges, participants in Turkish Pride parades demonstrate incredible resilience and determination. These marches are essential for advocating for equal rights, visibility, and challenging societal norms. They offer a space for solidarity and empowerment for the LGBTQ+ community, albeit in a more contentious and challenging environment.

It is important to note that attending Pride marches in Spain and Turkey can evoke different emotions and experiences. There is a sense of celebration, acceptance, and progress in Spain. Participants can freely express themselves and experience a welcoming atmosphere. Conversely, Pride parades in Turkey can be more politically charged and confrontational due to the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights in a society that still holds conservative values. The atmosphere might be tinged with a sense of defiance and a call for change, underscoring the ongoing fight for equality. Thus, attending Pride marches in Spain and Turkey offers contrasting experiences that reflect the different contexts surrounding LGBTQ+ rights in each country. Spain's progressive laws and acceptance foster a joyous and inclusive atmosphere, while Turkey's marches highlight the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community and their ongoing struggle for recognition and equality. Despite these differences, both Pride parades serve as vital platforms for visibility, solidarity, and advocating for LGBTQ+ rights in their respective societies.

Attending a Pride parade through an autoethnographic approach provided a profound understanding of the significance of such gatherings. It allowed me to connect with the identities, explore the community's rich diversity, and witness the collective strength that emerges when people unite. Pride marches serve as transformative spaces, fostering empowerment, visibility, and the ongoing pursuit of equality. They represent a colorful tapestry where personal experiences and broader cultural shifts intersect, paving the way for a more inclusive and accepting society.

## Conclusion

Participating in two Pride parades, one in Spain and the other in Turkey, has given me a profound personal insight into the flexible nature of identities and the various challenges experienced within diverse cultural settings. Immersing myself in these differing environments has enabled me to observe the intricate relationship between individual expressions of queerness and the societal constructs that aim to define and confine them. This commentary argues for a more inclusive approach that values diversity and promotes acceptance of all sexual orientations. It reframes the experi-

ence from challenging heterosexuality to challenging the societal structures that may marginalize or discriminate against non-heterosexual individuals.

In essence, this statement argues for a more inclusive approach that values diversity and promotes acceptance of all sexual orientations, while acknowledging that the majority of the population identifies as heterosexual. It reframes the conversation from challenging heterosexuality itself to challenging the societal structures that may marginalize or discriminate against non-heterosexual individuals.

Through my personal observation and engagement, I have come to recognize the significance of Pride parades as spaces where individuals can assert their identities, challenge societal norms, and foster a sense of community. Both Pride marches in Spain and Turkey showcased the resilience and strength of LGBTQ+ individuals, even in the face of heteronormative restrictions and ignorance. In Spain, the Pride parades exuded an atmosphere of celebration, inclusivity, and acceptance. It was a vibrant and joyous gathering that celebrated the diverse range of queer identities and expressions. The sense of empowerment and visibility at the Spanish Pride Parades was palpable, emphasizing the progress made in LGBTQ+ rights and the support from broader society. Contrastingly, the Pride Marches in Turkey operated within a more restrictive environment, where societal and political forces created significant challenges for queer individuals. Despite these obstacles, the Pride parades participants in Turkey demonstrated immense courage and determination. Their resilience in the face of adversity was inspiring as they navigated a landscape that demanded careful negotiation of their identities.

My experience in two Pride parades has reinforced my belief in the importance of creating spaces for self-expression, solidarity, and visibility for all members of the LGBTQ+ community, regardless of the socio-political climate. My journey through these two Pride parades has affirmed the need for ongoing efforts to challenge heteronormativity, dismantle oppressive structures, and foster inclusivity worldwide. Through personal reflections and shared experiences, we can continue striving for a future where queer individuals can express their authentic selves freely, without fear or discrimination.

**Funding** Open Access funding provided thanks to the CRUE-CSIC agreement with Springer Nature.

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