

# On Suffering a Crisis of Pride

A few weeks ago, I met a potential suitor at Coffee Time on NW 21st, a rare daytime meet-and-greet made possible by my favorite video game, Grindr. We exchanged an awkward hug, found an empty table and dove headfirst into cold, monotonous conversation. The steady whir of espresso machines and the endless chatter emanating from patrons around us dwarfed our sad attempts at discourse. I tapped my cup nervously; we traded long, blank stares and hurried phrases—sometimes lovers interrupt one other because they're excited to share, other times because they so thoroughly bore one another. He had me at "I think Bill Murray's weird."

The conversation grew particularly uncomfortable when it veered toward jobs. I covered my laundry list of occupations, the makeshift, patchwork quilt of gigs that keeps me afloat and in the city. When he asked why I work so much, I explained: my exorbitant drinking budget. Crickets. *Just Out* came up, and our fledgling dynamic again worsened—he unleashed a diatribe, one I'd expect from my zealous, fundamentalist cousin. "My existence has so much more going for it, too much to revolve around gay culture," he started. "Being gay doesn't define me. And Pride?" He dismissed Pride with a wave of his hand. The already disastrous date ended with a thud;



## lady about town

BY DANIEL BORGEN

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awkward hugs were replaced with dead-eyed stares and half-assed excuses to leave.

I thought about him for days after, not because he was all that dashing or interesting—I found him terribly tedious, and I'm sure he felt the same. His words haunted me for days after. Could I unequivocally define myself outside my queer community? Could any gay I know? Would we even want to? While I can perhaps empathize with (but not understand) aversions to elaborate drag shows or gigantic Pride parades, empathy stops there. How does who you fuck not define you? Looked around the world lately? Consumed any media? Sexuality is built into everything, it's unavoidable. Make no mistake: Queerness affects us.

That's why Pride, as watered down as it's become (think: right after Stonewall), is paramount. In my earliest sentient gay years, cloistered in a cult, I sneaked downtown to

catch peeks of parades, drag queens and what was then an unofficial gay headquarters, Balloons Over Broadway. I hunted down the gay newspaper—and read it. I caught glimpses of things that made my abnormality more comfortable—shots of adrenaline to burgeoning self-esteem. I nursed these earliest adventures with camaraderie alone, hoarding every morsel. Eventually, I found community.

A few weeks ago, a gay man, Brad, and his date were beaten on the Eastbank Esplanade, presumably for holding hands. It seems they inadvertently let being gay define them. I don't know Brad particularly well, but from our semi-regular interactions I've found him to be gracious and sweet—I can only assume the same for any boy he'd choose to pursue. What makes this already reprehensible incident worse: It seems people watched—and did nothing. No one yelled. No one called the police. Brad somehow found a way to break free of the fracas and summon the authorities. Now, our community rallies around them.

A recent Saturday afternoon, clad in short shorts, I basked in temporary sunshine while grocery shopping on NW 21st when a group

of young men sitting in front of Blue Moon yelled "faggot" at me. Emboldened by a street filled with people, I hollered back, "Beaverton is over *that* hill. Go eat there next time." Later that evening, friends and I sauntered down Stark toward Silverado from Maricon at Matador, a typical jaunt. Midway, the same bridge-and-tunnel type passed us, slowed down, murmuring, eventually showered us with gay epithets and all manner of physical intimidation. It wasn't until I pulled out my cell phone and called 911 that the rubbish scurried away.

I'd love to blame the Rose Festival or Timbers games for attracting unsavory types. But carnies and crazed soccer fans aren't responsible for *all* the hate—and dissecting it is another column for another day. I'm not particularly "gay" looking (maybe my shorts are), but I'm heckled and hated anyway. Brad wasn't prancing around in drag when he was attacked—not that *that* would be a viable excuse. If we're going to be hated for who we are, let's *be* who we are, no lurking in shadows or blending in. So our avoid-downtown-at-all-costs Pride parade isn't as radical as post-Stonewall celebrations were. Regardless, it's one of the best ways of letting the gay "define" me—and I'm perfectly okay with that. ☐

*I'm betting he'll be there—I'll be baring my legs.*  
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