

# TA CK COMMUNITY OF KINKSTERS

# TRAVERSE AREA

## History of Kink at Pride

### History of Leather and Kink Culture

The prevalence of Leather in Kink specifically can be attributed to gay male Leather subculture in the late 1940s. It was inspired by post-WWII motorcycle culture, where Leather became a symbol of rebellion and dissatisfaction with societal pressures. Many returning veterans had difficulty readjusting to civilian life and missed adventurous male camaraderie, which led to the rise of motorcycling after the war. Marlon Brando's role in *The Wild One* (1953) became a cultural reference that played on pop culture's interest in bikers, with the image of him perched atop his Triumph in a black leather jacket and Muir cap encapsulating masculine independence and defiance of societal expectations of the time. Bikers and Leather represented a non-conformist stylized version of masculinity that was both marginal and oppositional, dangerous and protective. They represented self-empowerment, strength, and refusal to assimilate to societal norms. This was in stark contrast to the public perception and media representation of gay men as passive, effeminate individuals.

At the time, homosexuality was still widely condemned, classified in the United States as a mental illness up until 1973. This was during the Lavender Scare, a decades-long attempt by politicians and public officials to purge federal employment of gay and lesbian people. This was a time where you could not only lose your job but be publicly ostracized and targeted for being gay. There was no positive representation of homosexuality in the media either. U.S. censorship codes of the late 1950s and 60's restricted depictions of overtly homosexual acts, allowing only for depictions of homosexuality set in a negative context. Anti-sodomy laws were used to target the Queer Community, citing anything outside of traditional heteronormative sex as morally perverse and grounds for a fine and/or imprisonment (Some of these laws are still in effect in 16 states as of 2020.) There was also the three-article rule, an unofficial rule of thumb that punished those who were not wearing three pieces of clothing that correspond with their assigned gender at birth. Homosexuality and gender non-conformity were treated like public indecency. It was looked at as an example of a sick perverted individual.

Bikers were looked down on in society, but not villainized or hunted outright like homosexuals were. Biker clubs allowed gay men to build Community and relationships under the guise of male camaraderie. In the Queer Community, Leather became a symbol of reclaimed sexuality, of forged strength, of pride in the so-called perverse. As the decades rolled on, it continued to permeate throughout the Community, with gay Leather bars and clubs springing up throughout the '60s and '70s. Gay Leather subculture became more closely entwined with Kink and BDSM as an alternate form of intimacy. Anti-sodomy laws made traditional forms of intimacy inaccessible to Queer and trans people.

Kink and BDSM served a vital role in fostering Queer sexuality by allowing it to exist. Leather and Kink were not only foundational for Queer Community building, but the Leather Community provided much-needed support to the sick and dying in the early 1980s during the rise of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The Kink and Leather Community were among some of the first responders to the HIV/AIDS crisis— physically providing care like bathing, feeding and quality time with patients that nurses and doctors were afraid to touch, stepping in as safe sex educators to the Community, and holding various fundraising events.

Looking at the history and understanding how gay Leather culture has helped forge our Community, it's undeniable that Kink belongs at pride. It's also undeniable that Kink continues to be stigmatized and widely misunderstood. Kink and more specifically BDSM have grown in popularity and visibility, but namely in a heterosexual context and without much regard for its history in the Queer Community.

### A Brief History of Pride

Pride began as a remembrance of The Stonewall Rebellion in June of 1969, when the NYPD raided the Stonewall Inn and began arresting patrons. The Community as a whole rose up in resistance with over a thousand people protesting in the street.

During the 1970s an ethos of shared sexual oppression gave way to a proliferation of gay identities grounded in different politics, classes, genders, races, and variant sexualities. In particular trans people, bisexual people, women, and people of color fought for inclusion in decision-making and the recognition of their needs and advocated for specific political goals in the burgeoning movement.

### How They Connect

Pete Fiske, a Leatherman, was a regular patron of the Stonewall and marched in the first San Francisco Gay Freedom Day in 1970.

Brenda Howard, the "Mother of Pride" was a bisexual Leatherwoman who is claimed to come up with the idea of pride week and marched wearing her Leather gear instead of toning it down for the masses.

Troy Perry, Leatherman and reverend, was one of the three chief organizers of the first Los Angeles Pride and founded the Metropolitan Community Church which supports pride events around the world.

Larry Townsend, author of "The Leatherman's Handbook" was another organizer for the first L.A. Pride and founder of L.A.'s Gay Community Services Center

In 1983, The New York Leather Community held a fundraiser to ensure there would be a pride event the next year since corporations did not sponsor Pride at the time. The annual Leather Pride Nights raised more money than any other event the Heritage of Pride organization was involved in.

These are just a few examples of how the Leather and Kink communities have been involved in Pride over the decades. The Leather and Kink Community have had a place in the Queer Community and Pride events since the beginning. We all just want the right to love who and how we want to without backlash or judgement.

Information above obtained at:

<https://www.thepomonan.com/lgbtqa-plus/2021/6/9/how-kink-belongs-at-pride>  
and <https://aphyr.com/data/posts/358/Leather-pride> in.