

# Prejudice Affects Gay Folks, Too

By Mark Drum  
Q-Notes Staff

All the self-help books and psychotherapy in the world cannot teach like experience. I'm forty-one years old and thought I had learned my lessons. People or events, I believed, couldn't shock me. I had been to the circus and had seen the elephants, I thought.

I find myself wondering how prejudice can be so prevalent within the gay community. In fact, some of the more vocally prejudiced people I have ever met have been gay. How tragic. How ironic.

The amount of energy, destructive and poisonous to the person creating and living with it as well as those they touch is sad to see. It is wasted on tearing down all that most of us stand for and fight for.

Gays have been persecuted in most societies since the dawn of man. We are the first generation to have the tools and power of communication through satellite networks, the press and, sadly, the AIDS epidemic, to reach millions of people. We can show them, say to them, "Please don't hate us. We are a kind and gentle people."

Are we?

One person hates drag queens, some gay men and lesbians still haven't figured out that we are on the same team. Others criticize transsexuals or anyone who leads a slightly different lifestyle.

The insidious nature of prejudice is that the louder someone criticizes others, the less likely they are to recognize the distortion of their thinking. You cannot rationalize prejudice and you can't talk someone out of it.

Not easily.

The root of prejudice is deep. It is a learned phenomenon. Most of us, as gay adults, have some deep-seated prejudice against ourselves. It is why we have so much trouble coming out and living happy, productive lives as adults who happen to be gay. We define ourselves by our gayness, and yet have been brought up in a society which teaches us it is OK to hate people we don't understand.

We cannot expect others to stop fearing us until we stop being afraid of ourselves. I think one way is to better educate ourselves as to our own prejudices and thereby learn to deal more effectively with others.

Sometimes it is easy to get wrapped up in the gay lifestyle. It is even easier to forget how traumatic it was when we first came out to someone...and what it feels like to be rejected just because we told something about ourselves that has always been there, but never discussed.

All of us have situations or people with whom we are not comfortable. Perhaps this is prejudice in its most insidious form. We may not even be aware. Perhaps it is nothing more than personal choice. I am concerned with the deeper prejudices that I see among the gay community.

We have a responsibility to be not only good examples to the rest of our community: we must be excellent.

I remember singing at a Gay Pride Day march:

We are straight and gay together.  
We are men and women together.

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We are black and white together.  
We are a kind and gentle people.  
And we are singing for our lives.

Together. Not alone. Powerless alone. We have been alone for all time prior to this. Since Stonewall. Making small in-roads toward freedom and dignity. Praying that each small step forward isn't followed by two steps back.

Now we have a chance to make a difference that the world will see and judge us by. We can seize this opportunity or let it slip by, quietly and unnoticed.

The number of AIDS cases reported in Mecklenburg County has doubled again. Over two hundred members of the Charlotte community have been stricken by this disease. Have you stopped to think how you have been reacting to the epidemic?

For all of the kindnesses shown to me since I have come out about having AIDS, I remember what I do not see. Perhaps it is not seeing an old colleague or friend. At times a hug from an old pal when a kiss is expected; a shortened visit from another. Subtle, true. But clear when you experience the change. It is that insidious form of prejudice about which I spoke earlier.

I do not doubt their love. It has been doubly returned from people I didn't know six months ago. But I miss it. Change is hard.

This is not something I feel powerless against. I keep educating. I keep talking. I keep writing. I keep saying to each of you: You can make a difference. If you change one person's perspective in a single prejudicial area, you have made a significant contribution.

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Get some information. Call Metrolina AIDS Project and volunteer. Give some money. Do something.

I am one voice in the wilderness. We are millions strong. I believe with all my heart that we, as a gay and lesbian community, have the political clout to move mountains. If only we unite.

If you are frightened by the epidemic. If you are not knowledgeable about AIDS. How will you feel when 500 or a thousand of your peers are sick? When it's 4,000. When it's you?

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