

Are there any positive consequences of the AIDS crisis??

The AIDS virus has changed the life of the modern homosexual. Clearly, this epidemic is the worst tragedy to strike the homosexual community since persecution in Hitler's Germany. Perhaps the only difference is that the virus is non-thinking and amoral while Hitler's immoral actions required careful forethought. Nonetheless, both Hitler and AIDS precipitated crises in the homosexual community.

Many other minority groups, including Jews, Blacks, Asians, and women, have been struck by crises and have found it necessary to bond together in order to make it through the time of crisis and to reach the clearing on the other side of the forest. This is the challenge that faces all gay men and lesbians in the midst of the AIDS crisis. Surely, it is much easier to see the positive results of decidedly terrible epochs in history once one has made it through to the next era. Yet, in order to make the pain and challenges of today more bearable, we should focus on what we stand to gain as individuals and as a community from this terrible disease while still in its midst.

the evolution of life-style, political awareness, and love

The 1960s bore witness to many milestones in gay and lesbian rights. While this was the decade in which many homosexuals became politically active for the first time in their public lives, it was also the decade that witnessed the personal evolution of the "gay narcissist."

For the first time we, along with many other Americans, began to explore ourselves and to learn how to enjoy pleasure without the associated guilt. We felt free to be different for the first time in our lives, and many gay men began actively pursuing "different" life-styles in a conscious and often sub-conscious break with an oppressive past dictated by strict norms.

The result was that for ten years or so gay men became overly preoccupied with the "self" and with its gratification by whatever means available. Men have historically (notoriously?) affirmed their manhood through sex and conquest. Thus, it comes as no surprise that gay men as well began to assert themselves sexually and to conquer other men.

What about love? Well, certainly love continued to eek out an existence. But increasingly love became confined to love of self, because for so long our "selves" had gone unloved. The sixties

and seventies were a time of celebration: celebration of the freedom that accompanied political awareness, our new life-style, and self-love.

enter tragedy

The entry of the AIDS virus into the gay community has gradually altered many of the attitudes that were formed in the sixties and seventies. This change has come about at the cost of many thousands of priceless human lives, and if somehow it were possible to end this epidemic now or have prevented it from ever having happened this would be ideal. But the fact remains that AIDS is with us, and it has fundamentally altered us as individuals and as a community.

the gay and lesbian community

The AIDS epidemic, though tragic in itself, has had the positive effect of re-incorporating the "gay narcissist" into the larger "gay community." As we have lost our brothers, lovers, friends, and acquaintances to the disease, we have been forced to bond together more tightly to combat it. In the late 1980s AIDS has become the central issue uniting members of the gay and lesbian community and simultaneously an issue uniting the homosexual and the heterosexual communities.

A good example of this is the Names Quilt, recently on display in Washington DC. There were gays and lesbians, homos and heteros, rich and poor, black and white side by side collectively mourning the loss of nearly 9,000 wonderful human beings. AIDS is tragic, but even more tragic is the fact that it has taken such a terrible event to precipitate such unity. Yet surely these people have not died in vain. Certainly the victims of AIDS immortalized in the Quilt would be moved by the sight of thousands of "individuals" coming together for such an expression of "communal" love and compassion.

Another example is the phenomenon of numerous buddy programs that have grown up to provide support for PWAs. While neither PWAs nor buddies are all gay men, one outcome of these projects is that gay men help other gay men by reaching out to them in a purely un"self"ish fashion, exemplifying once

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