

gay visibility began in the 1950's, countless studies, investigative reports, and mandates have come to not only define the non-queer majority's understanding of LGBTQ persons, but to institutionalize these perceptions.

Institutional homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are prejudices which extend beyond the day-to-day abuses suffered by LGBTQ persons; these prejudices define our legal identities as citizens. These are the biases that allowed the World Health Organization to keep homosexuality on its official list of mental disorders until the 1990s and that allow it to keep transgender identities on it to this day.

These biases inspired the creation of sodomy laws in many U.S. states through 2003 and continue to make homosexuality a capital crime in countries like Saudi Arabia, Mauritania and Iran. They have allowed scientific studies that marginalize LGBTQ identities to be conducted and published as fact, studies which have allowed the Red Cross to refuse blood donations from queer male donors and which have encouraged the emergence of the "conversion therapy" industry.

The extent to which these institutionalized prejudices influence the identities of LGBTQ persons is unquantifiable. The need for validation is one shared by all minority groups, not just to defend rights and liberties but to affirm our community as a legitimate part of society. As a bisexual female, seeing my identity publicly vindicated long after I've internally validated it may not tell me that my sexuality is illegitimate, but it does tell me that it has not been considered legitimate by my society as public knowledge until recently.

After years of coming to know myself as a bisexual woman I am secure in my identity, but there is still a certain sting that accompanies hearing that others do not share my understanding. However, through learning to see

that this sting has no bearing on how I see myself, I have been able to cultivate what I can call "pride" in my sexuality. By viewing prejudice as merely prejudice and not something which defines me; I am able to create my own visibility; to claim my own self-determination.

Institutional bigotry limits us in real and tangible ways and must be fought with as much vigor as the LGBTQ community can muster. We cannot, however, allow it to limit us for even an instant in the self-respect we deserve to feel every day. Though as a bisexual female I am socially marginalized, I cannot allow prejudice to rob me of my legitimacy and the visibility I wish for myself and for those like me.

Every person of every identity that falls within the LGBTQ spectrum, be they genderqueer folks, gay bears, drag kings and queens, bi-dykes, pansexuals, two-spirited, femme, fairy, butch, queen and everyone in between should fight with fierceness and the tendencies that exist in society and within our own community that make us feel less-than. If your identity seems invisible, be the person who brings it out into the light. Let your flag fly, and if no flag yet exists under which you wish to stand, make your own.