



“Sanitized for Your Protection”

March 18, 2009 By [Richard Ferri, PhD, ANP](#)

We all know life can be a very dirty business. Over the past few days I have had some very distinct reminders of this and they are beginning to wear me down. Recently, I have had people “let me know” that they actually don’t like me because I am HIV positive and a recovering alcoholic. My problem is NOT the “not liking me” part...I am old enough to go with that old flow and have people “not like me” because I am anything from an Anglican church going queer to muscled up jock that practices medicine to my decision to shave my head. I am really okay with it.

This does not mean I am not hurt or baffled by it, but I am not losing sleep over it either. I have many imperfections such as not getting along with others and their views. This is life pure and simple. However, the difference is I do not go out of my way to let someone know that I have translated disagreeing with them on a matter to a personal dislike of them because we have opposing views.

Not everyone has to get along or *even should*. Different opinions, positions, and views are what help keep the checks and balances of life working. But the world is changing, as it does in poor economic times, to a much more harsh and raw place. People fear the unknown consequences of impending financial disaster, hunger, and the death of their dreams with an anger the turns outward and damages others.

I also know that life is not some pretty thing that gets routinely cleaned up with a “Sanitized for Your Protection” ribbon wrapped around it. Life sometimes is just fucking hard. There really isn’t any two ways about it.

But what doesn’t have to happen are people becoming cruel. There are enough lunatics out there that inflict cruelty on the masses for the sheer fun of it that filters down to the rest of us. Firing hate directly at someone’s head is unnecessary. If you survive long enough you will either take a direct hit or at the very least suffer an annoying skin graze of hate.

I remember when I was doing my anesthesia rotation in graduate school all the faculty and students would write in the clinical chart of a gay person the this typical description: “Jane Smith is a 29 YO lesbian with lower abdominal pain of unknown etiology...”

After numerous discussions with the faculty and fellow grad students they could not explain to me why it was clinically important to identify someone’s sexual orientation (again remember this was in the early 1980s when “tolerance” of gays was hardly an acceptable thing). So after banging my head against the wall I started my notes with a slightly altered preamble that typically read: “Dave Purdy is 48 year old heterosexual with chronic headaches and blurred vision...” I will let your mind conjure up the drama that my calling people heterosexuals caused. It was both funny and sad. It was also just pathetic.

So nearly 30 years latter while a lot has certainly changed something’s, others remain constant. Bigots remain bigots

only more restrained (in some places) and the tilt of world into a despair not seen since the beginning of the LAST century has made vocalizing hate easier.

I am suggesting that we try some simple things in these harsh times. Think before you speak. Wash your hands. Smile. Be polite. And for God's sake help anyone you can.

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