

# From Isolation to Healing

BY WALTER I. ZEICHNER

Something we share as human beings is the need to feel connected to something larger. It starts as an infants' need to feel connection with a nurturer. This need is absolute. It's life and death.

health & wellbeing

Without nurturing, infants die. As we get older, our needs for connection change, but they never go away. We need family. We need friends. We need community. Many of us need mates.

GLBTQ people are making great progress in shedding shame and establishing ourselves as visible in contemporary American society. We are a strong political force. We are vocal. We are involved in lawmaking as well as electing public officials. However, we are a minority. We are still outsiders. Ignorance about who and what we are is still pervasive.

Meeting the need for connections, and especially for community, can be obstructed or obfuscated by the political forces we encounter. It can be painful, difficult, even feel impossible, for a GLBTQ person to find a community when we are still struggling for visibility and having to protect our very lives from ignorant people who would (and do) hurt us. This reality has a significant impact on GLBTQ people even when we feel relatively safe and connected.

The week after Matthew Shepard was murdered, I had occasion to talk with a gay man experiencing a lot of physical stress. His body had gone into spasms, particularly his back and neck, and he was in a lot of pain. I am a psychotherapist and massage therapist, so I view physical

symptoms from a holistic perspective as part of the entire person, not just as isolated physical events. We did a bodywork session, and discovered that the pain in his body was directly related to the fear and pain he felt over the murder of Matthew Shepard. This didn't surprise me, but it did illustrate clearly how the oppression of members of our GLBTQ minority group affects us all whether we are aware of it or not.

The reality is that in the United States in 1999, we are still targets. We are making lots of progress in educating society at large, and many people who have been ignorant are becoming less so. We have a long way to go before we are seen as who we are and not as the caricatures we have been depicted as. This journey takes its toll on each of us. Some of what we need to maintain our mental health and to foster a sense of well being is community.

Gay Pride is the event at which our community makes its biggest showing. I go every year because it is good for me to be part of the crowd, to see so many of us together. Many people don't feel comfortable going to a public event such as Pride. There are many who don't get the sense of being part of something significant. They struggle with shame they have been taught or fear of being ostracized or injured, and they feel isolated.

Each human is part of the whole of humanity, which is part of the community of life on this planet, which in turn is part of the cosmos. That means that each and every one of us matters because we are part of the whole universe, the totality of which is beyond our comprehension.

So isolation is but an illusion — a powerfully deceiving illusion with a lot of pain attached. We are not isolated, but we can experience ourselves as isolated if we believe that we are unworthy of connection or that connection is

impossible. Being GLBTQ, for many of us, has brought varying forms and degrees of rejection from people and communities we wanted to be part of. Those experiences left scars in the form of beliefs and fears. Sometimes we are aware of those scars, and we consciously strive to contradict beliefs that hurt us and heal the fears that hold us back. Sometimes those scars are unconscious, and we don't realize the ways in which those old wounds are still affecting us.

We are a gift to the whole of humanity. Every variation adds something to the whole, and we are part of that. We owe it to ourselves, to each other, and to the world to take good care of ourselves by recognizing our wounds and striving to heal them. We have the ability to be a loving and supportive community made up of many smaller communities under the GLBTQ umbrella. The more accepting we are of each other, the more acceptance we all experience, and that is a good thing for all of us.

Examine your own feelings of isolation and your own sense of belonging to community. What are your needs? Are they being met? Are you aware of obstacles to your needs being met? Do you reach out to people to include them? Do people reach out to you? Do you feel limited by any fears or old wounds? How can you address them?

The more aware you are of what is inside you, the more options you may perceive. The more flexibility you experience about how you can be in the world, the more likely you are to make choices that allow you to express yourself, to accept yourself, and to connect with people in nurturing ways. ▼

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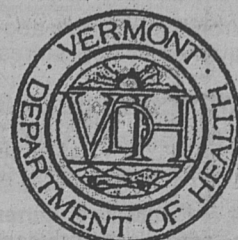
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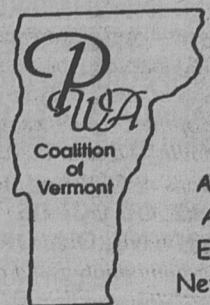


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