

Out of Sight, Out of Mind

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Abstract

Pride Party this year was fun, and probably left most of us a little fuzzy-minded. Like all parties where we partake a bit too much, there's always the obligatory hangover. This year I made good on a promise and attended a friend's Pride party at THE Pride Parade in New York City. Yes, my hometown [...]

Article

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This year I made good on a promise and attended a friend's Pride party at THE Pride Parade in New York City. Yes, my hometown Houston's Pride Parade is unique in that it's at night, with lit up floats - the only night Pride Parade in the northern hemisphere. Even with that, nothing tops the sheer size of the Pride Parade in New York. It's befitting. After all, this is the catalyst point and the anniversary date that the GLBT community points to as beginning this "movement."

Just last week I was in New York enjoying the Pride Parade with some trans friends I'll call Ann and Melissa. Neither of them is out at work due to concerns for their careers, and I don't blame them. But once a year they throw a blast and open their apartment to the community. The building they reside in is right on the parade route and has numerous Pride parties on Pride day. Their party is the hit of Trans NYC, and they extend invitations to their friends from all walks of society: straight, gay, lesbian and trans in fairly equal numbers.

One of the neat aspects of this one-day blast is that neighboring parties tend to migrate to each other's parties on the other floors of the building. At one point, a group of the trans girls and I (admittedly in pursuit of a hunky NYPD officer making the scene) decided to go crash the party two floors below.

Arriving downstairs, it was a lively and typically (for New York) crowded affair. We were very welcomed to the party, no problems there. One thing struck me shortly after arriving. This was a very homogenous affair. Before we arrived, it was a 100% gay male event - most all seemingly coupled. It was in sharp contrast to the party I'd just left.

After a bit, I wandered back upstairs to Ann's party and watched the entry for Empire State Pride Agenda (ESPA) walk by. The ESPA marchers all held up signs that had "Marriage Equality" on one side, and "GENDA Now" on the other. For those of you not familiar, New York passed a non-discrimination bill in 2002 called SONDA - Sexual Orientation Non Discrimination Act. GENDA is the Gender Expression counterpart to that as, obviously, coverage for transgenders was left off.

The reason I knew of this and became involved was that the push for this began at a time of internecine struggle within the state's transgender organization (NYAGRA), and followed immediately on the heels of Sylvia Rivera's funeral. The timing was exquisite for ESPA, but callously calculating from a trans perspective.

Back to the parade, the ESPA group marched with their signs held high ... and to a person, all but one of them held it with the Marriage Equality side out to the crowd. Only one bothered to hold the GENDA side out.

Flashback to 2003, at the signing of SONDA, ESPA and their executive director, Matt Foreman, promised that GENDA would now become the group's top priority. Well, other things got in the way ... things change ... people forget. It didn't happen. Malicious intent probably wasn't the culprit. More likely, we just didn't cross their mind.

Back to the parade, ESPA only got a lukewarm reception that paled in comparison to who followed them: AVER - the American Veterans for Equal Rights. It also didn't help much that many of them chose to wear those infernal equal signs on their chest or sleeve.

A while later, HRC's entry rolled up. Cheering ceased, and not just at our party. The entire building went mute. No boos or raspberries, just silence. It was mildly amusing to watch some of their marchers peer up at the building in bewilderment. Then again, I also felt a bit sad for them. It's likely their marchers were volunteers who couldn't understand why the cool reception or the history behind it. All they knew was what was marketed to them, and the possibility they saw in that vision.

From the trans community and beyond, we're all just likely folks who never really crossed their mind.

And truly, why would we? They've got their own laundry list of wishes on their agenda. Their organization staffs are very homogenous because, hey, those are the people they know. It's kind of like the party two floors down from Ann and Melissa: they invite the people they know, and those are the people they know.

Regarding GLBT organizations, transgenders and other disparate segments of the greater queer community don't readily come to mind for hiring, leadership or other considerations. Why would we pop to mind when it comes to political agendas - especially if they don't have to dig their asses out of the fire for some exclusionist faux pas? It's a case of out of sight, out of mind.

So why do we refer to these organizations as GLBT anyway? True, we worked hard over the years in the 90's to be recognized as a part of the community, but that didn't mean our entire fight boiled down to being nothing more than a T at the end of an acronym. It's like saying our entire goal was to be the butt on a pig, with all the significance. Dandy! So why don't they just advertise just GL or GLB? Sure, it's not PC. But what the hell good is being PC if all it requires is just saying "I'm GLBT" and never giving it another thought (at least not until those screaming trannies throw their asses in the fire when they're forgotten again)?

If these organizations were all trans staffed, trans funded and led, chances are that we would be accused of equally focusing only on our own issues and not having theirs come naturally to mind. It's possible we could be just as guilty ... of course, we'll never know.

Meanwhile, back at Ann and Melissa's party, I reveled in what was the vision of true equality at their party. Not just trans, and really not even overwhelmingly trans ... just a bunch of G and L and B and T and straight folks enjoying a great Pride Party. At least in some corners of the world, we can all be kept in mind.

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