

Why a Straight Married Guy Marches in Gay Pride Parades*

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Every now and then I meet somebody who expresses surprise that my wife Deborah and I march in a Gay Pride Parade every year and have been doing so since 1988.

Marching in the parade began as an expression of support for our friend Winnifred who, at the age of 18, wrote us a letter explaining that she had come to terms with being a lesbian; she hoped that it would not damage our friendship. I remember how Deborah and I looked at each other in astonishment and wondered why on earth our love and esteem for Winnie would change as a result of her recognizing her own sexual orientation. We immediately took her up on her invitation to join her in marching in the Montréal pride parade in 1988.

The parades are so much fun that we look forward to them every year and recruit gay and straight friends to join us in supporting GLBT rights. We've met some amazing people and had wonderful conversations with characters we might never have met. Some of those people have a sexual orientation very different from ours.

Speaking for myself, **I don't care!**

Let me be very clear: **I do not care what anybody else says about a person's gender or sexual orientation.** When someone introduces herself using feminine (or male) self reference, that's good enough for me. It does not concern me **and it should not concern anyone else** how many X and Y chromosomes that person has. I interact with human beings as individuals, not as some kind of cookie cutter representatives of classes defined by what somebody else chooses to consider important.

As a statistician (teaching applied stats in universities since 1976), I am deeply suspicious of stereotyping. Just because someone chooses to focus on a particular feature and define a group ("homosexuals," "Blacks," "Whites," "Jews," "Christians," "accountants," "Republicans") does not mean that every member of that group is identical to every other member. Many years ago, the famous social scientist Gordon Allport pointed out that some groups *are* indeed defined by identifying characteristics that are widely shared; for example, most people who define themselves as female have XX chromosomes and most people with XX chromosomes define themselves as female. However, **correlations should not override personal identity.** If someone with XY chromosomes perceives herself as female, that's fine with me. Furthermore, the majority of attributes of human beings are *not* defining characteristics. On the contrary, people vary widely within any defined group. So if I meet someone defined as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered, I don't know **anything** about them except maybe, in some cases, a sense of their sexual orientation. As for the rest, I have no idea. I don't know whether they're smart or stupid, rich or poor, nice or nasty, atheist or religious. I certainly don't know anything about their home life, their potential or actual competence as a parent, or the nature of their contributions to society. For those insights, **I have to get to know them as individuals, not as stereotypes.**

As for restricting the rights of people to marry each other as a function of their gender, it seems ridiculous. Why, we might as well propose stopping people from marrying each other because of differences of skin pigmentation!

Oh wait . . . we used to do that. We got better.

Time to do the same on gay marriage, don't you think?



* I submitted this essay to the Vermont Commission on Family Recognition and Protection in February 2008.