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Dallas Voice is published weekly on Fridays. Each reader is entitled to one free copy of each issue, obtained at official distribution locations. These locations include most area 7-Eleven stores and the businesses and organizations marked with an asterisk in the directories located near the back of this issue.

Subscriptions via First Class Mail are available at the following rates: Three months (13 consecutive issues), \$50. Six months (26 consecutive issues), \$80. One year (52 consecutive issues), \$120. Subscriptions are payable by check, cashier's check, money order, Visa, Mastercard or American Express.

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viewpoints

Prejudice in the LGBT community

Members of minorities within the LGBT community address the issue of ‘Pride Not Prejudice’

FROM THE TRANSGENDER VIEW:

Transgender life is full of obstacles and misconceptions, but rejection is rejection whether from the straight or LGBT community

I owned a thriving business — once. I traveled the world, assisting executives of organizations to develop efficient information technology strategies. I hired subcontractors to program the solutions.

All that disappeared when I started on the road to womanhood.

Was I surprised? Not really. After all, I had tried very hard to ignore my gender “situation” because I knew the potential business and personal ramifications. I knew that the technology world belongs to the male species and that executive offices of most companies are significantly male-dominated.

As a woman, I had little chance of being invited into that realm. As a transwoman, I had none.

But good business leaders adapt to changing conditions. I shifted my focus away from large companies scattered around the world and attempted to market to small-to-medium-sized companies in the DFW area. The results changed little.

Then came what appeared to be the break I was looking for: The GLBT community was forming a chamber of commerce, and I was invited to run for a seat on the board.

What an opportunity! I can market to GLBT businesses. They won't discriminate against “one of their own.”

I had a lot to learn. The only difference between the responses of the gay and straight communities to my sales efforts was that the gay community was more polite — and furtive — in its rejections.

Sales calls to straight businesses usually never got beyond the first phone call. The executive would hear a female name, detect a male voice and terminate the call with a “We don't need your services.” In most of the instances where I managed to schedule a face-to-face meeting, the gatekeepers would read me as a transgender and the person with whom I was scheduled to meet would



Janine Johnson  
Special Contributor

suddenly become unavailable. Calls to reschedule were ignored.

My experience with the gay community differed in several respects. Phone calls usually resulted in both friendly conversations — particularly when the company executive found out I was serving on the board of the GLBT Chamber. A meeting being scheduled was the normal result of these calls, and they actually took place.

As I presented my sales pitch, the typical response was one of apparent understanding and agreement. The meeting often ended with the executive admitting that the company needed my services. But when it came to signing a contract, things always went awry. The timing wasn't right. We needed to wait for the next budget cycle. “Our computer guy is on vacation.”

A variety of excuses dragged out the process until eventually I would be told they had decided not to bring me in. Different path from that experienced with the straight community, but the same outcome. At first, I was hurt by the experience. I had expected rejection by the straight community. But wasn't I a part of the GLBT community?

I had fallen into a trap of my own making. For a time, I had painted the GLBT community with

the same “broad brush” that we often see used by the straight community: “We've banded together under the GLBT acronym, so we should all understand and accept one another.”

Fortunately, it didn't take me long to see the error of my ways. We transgenders may be fighting for similar general goals as gays, lesbians and bisexuals, but that doesn't mean that they know any more about us than the straight community does. We may be brothers and sisters in a fight for equality and respect, but in some very fundamental ways, we are quite different. And being wary of what we don't know is a normal human response.

As is true in many aspects of life, education is the key. If the transgender community wishes to be accepted and respected, it must educate others — be they gay or straight. The first step in that process is for us to become much more visible.

Our community suffers from what I call “the prairie dog syndrome.” We spend much of our time hiding. We will pop up into view as we transition. But too many of us go back into hiding afterwards.

We must risk the perils of visibility to reap the rewards that come from showing others that we simply represent another aspect of complex condition called humanity. We must hold our heads high and respect ourselves before we can expect to gain the respect of others.

After all, respect is not given. It must be earned. Janine D. Johnson is president of J.D. Johnson & Associates. She also served on the board of directors for the North Texas GLBT Chamber of Commerce. She is the author of a popular reference book, and has spoken at conferences throughout the U.S., Europe and Australia.

FROM THE LATINO VIEW:

Latino gays and lesbians must balance acculturating into LGBT community with valuing and respecting their ethnic heritage

As I sit and ponder the theme of this year's parade — Pride Not Prejudice — I can't help but wonder how many will simply embrace the theme of being proud of being gay and doing away with prejudice directed at us from straight society, and how many will see it in broader terms, including the idea of “Pride Not Prejudice” within the various cultures that make up our LGBT community.

Occasionally I am asked if prejudice and discrimination among the white LGBT community exists toward the Latino LGBT community. My response has always been, “It depends on who you ask.”

Second and third generation gay Latinos that were born here, educated here and have become acculturated into the main culture, both straight

knowledgeable sources



“It's evidently not that uncommon.”  
Laura Martin, the Dallas Police Department's liaison to the LGBT community, about a crackdown on indecent exposure by straight men on the Katy Trail.



“This is a job we are supposed to do.”  
Jim Davis, executive director of the Disciples of Trinity, speaking at the charitable group's fundraising dinner

“Because Tyrone Garner and John Lawrence had the courage to challenge homophobic sodomy laws, the U.S. Supreme Court recognized that love, sexuality and family play the same role in gay people's lives as they do for everyone else.”

Kevin Cathcart, executive director of Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, commenting on Garner's recent death