

# The Rush of Judgment

By A. China

I am judgmental about all sorts of things, from art to zoos, and about many of the people in our community. I'm fine with that. But I realize that many other gay men are not fine with that. Why not ask ourselves whether we're hurting ourselves collectively by not judging?

I first noticed the whole "non-judgmental" thing back in the 70s; a leftist reaction to the overt racism, sexism, homophobia, classism and all the other "isms" of decades past. Most of us probably agree that judging people purely on the basis of race, sex, erotic preference, class and other such matters is morally and intellectually indefensible. But is judgment always a bad thing? Can any of us really say that we never judge? When we accuse others of being "judgmental," aren't we just saying that they have opinions that make us feel uncomfortable? Isn't being "non-judgmental" towards the many men in our community who are screwing up their lives and taking down the lives of their friends and family along with them a case of throwing the baby out with the bathwater?

A personal case in point that's unfortunately all too common in our community: A friend of mine (call him Daniel) has a history of addiction: alcohol, cocaine, speed. Name a drug du jour, Daniel's at least tried it. I knew him when he was bright, articulate and fun before his life went out of control, before I

had to be the designated driver every time we went out. He was estranged from most of his family, they having wasted ten of thousands of dollars on rehab for him. Things got so bad that Daniel drove his expensive Honda (a birthday gift from his father) to crime-ridden East Los Angeles to sell the car to buy lots of crack. With drugs in hand, Daniel took the bus all the way home.

When Daniel told me that story, he had already been fired from three jobs and talked only about getting wasted all the time. Though HIV-negative, his skin tone, slurred speech and constant lethargy made him look very sick indeed. Gone was the well-read, jocular, sensitive guy I had known and liked so much. I don't know all the details of Daniel's journey into addiction, but I know that lots of people in his life had tried to help him.

After foolishly loaning Daniel money to buy himself food and him acknowledging that he used all of it to buy drugs for a prolonged party-filled weekend, we parted ways. Though shocked because he was a friend, I wasn't surprised. I later told him that I had reached rock bottom with him and that as a non-addict, I didn't think I could see him anymore. No matter what I said, he didn't seem to hear me. Becoming quite angry, he accused me of judging him.

Like many men in our community, the majority of Daniel's and my friends were against

my decision. They couldn't seem to wrap their minds around the idea that judgment can be a natural, compassionate response to the destructive behavior of loved ones. With their continued help and support, he continued to be active in his addiction, only beginning his process of recovery after almost killing himself with an accidental overdose. Daniel now acknowledges that if more of his friends had responded to his behavior the way I did, he would have begun his recovery earlier.

How and when do we as a community decide that passing judgment against our own is sometimes a good thing? Think about the last time you were silenced for being "judgmental" when a sero-negative friend started barebacking sero-positive guys without the use of condoms. Or when you said that the real reason a forty-something friend of yours has never had a relationship that lasted more than three months is that maybe he's just too damned picky. Or when a buddy wanted a loan from you to meet his rent because he had used his last paycheck to buy crystal meth.

As a community, making this step is not going to be easy. Many among us will find this to be in conflict with our egalitarian ideals. But I'm an equal opportunity basher. We as gay people continue to have to struggle against the judgments of an anti-gay social and political system run by right-wing

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ideologues whose peculiar brand of judgment is onerous to people who value reason.

Perhaps the far right and the far left have much more in common than either side is willing to admit. The religious right wants everyone to conform to "Christian" principles. And the far left seems most concerned with political correctness; community doesn't seem to matter as long as a committee approves of it first. People at both extremes of the political spectrum seem to have at least one thing in common: they don't want you to make up your own mind.

When others judge us negatively to the extent of attempting to take away our human rights, our personhood, even our very lives, aren't we correct in judging those people harshly and responding to that threat with appropriate and intelligent action? Deciding what that action will be calls for our ability to judge what will work best. The capacity for judgment is the finest quality of an active mind, allowing us to accept or reject what doesn't suit us. Judgment is that part of us which yearns for the best for ourselves, for those we love and for our community. Why reject it because it has a negative aspect?

Around the time I came out in the early 70s, I admired openly gay intellectuals and artists like Gore Vidal, Truman Capote, Gertrude Stein, Tennessee Williams, Christopher Isherwood,

Oscar Wilde and Natalie Barney. Those people never shied away from a battle of wits or a verbal brawl requiring keen insight and astute judgment. Why not carry on their legacy? In doing so, we can make those judgments that help us best take care of ourselves and each other.

A. China is an active member of SFGMCI, where he shoots his mouth off in an entertaining manner (he hopes). He is also a writer whose fame is in inverse proportion to his political correctness. His original musical, *The Virgin Diva*, will hopefully make its debut before the end of this century. Ditto his original screenplay, *Revenge is Sweet*, a dark comedy about the perils of heterosexuality in the cyber age. One can send a fan letter, a job offer, or a request for sexual favors to [ac94109@gmail.com](mailto:ac94109@gmail.com).