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Phobia fatigue: What if the battle gets tiring?

By Libay Linsangan Cantor

Have you ever had the feeling that sometimes, it's just too tiring to fight negativities? I have. I'm sure anyone who is in the middle of constant fighting, bickering and tension would feel too tired to fight, even if the fight is just a philosophical one. Arguing about your subject position on an issue, for instance, or trying to convince the other party to see the finer points of your point, that could get tiring, especially when you know it's like talking to a brick wall when you talk to certain people.

So why do we even bother?

Advocates get that, too, I'm sure, especially those advocating for the common good of their respective communities. But sometimes, asserting one's rights on basic social justice issues feel like talking to authorities who are made like brick walls, especially those who think they have been pillars of civilizations and believe that such pillars need no refurbishing due to the wear and tear of time. And such talks sometimes feel emotionally draining, leading to emotional fatigue. It's mentally exhausting sometimes.

Women, perhaps, sometimes feel this kind of emotional fatigue when they were starting with the feminist waves early on. Imagine tackling male-dominated societies head on, saying -- nay, demanding -- that they be given equal rights afforded to any citizen in the country. The [right to vote](#), the [right to marry](#) the man they love even if they are of a different race, the [right to own their own bodies](#), the [right to ride the bus](#) regardless of the color of their skin, the [right to enter school](#) and pursue an education regardless of who they are, the [right to say no](#). Name it, the women's movements all over the world have been fighting this fight. And still fighting, I should add, because the challenges never seem to end.

Sometimes I wonder what they do when they get tired, these women. Or anyone who has put up a good fight and won, put up a good fight and lost, and those whose fights keep on reproducing. How do you deal? Because no matter how we acknowledge how we roar, sometimes we just want to retreat to bed with a whimper -- and rest. No, I didn't say give up and go home. I just said rest. Is it even possible to rest, even for a while, when [there are still so many enormous issues to tackle](#), and gigantic battles that need to be won? Is rest possible?

As an advocate constantly having to explain -- nay, defend -- myself to society at large, I sometimes feel that it's emotionally tiring to face them, those who bear this venom called homophobia, and spit it out at the nearest queer person they encounter on the street. You walk on the streets and if you're holding hands with a man, they won't say anything. But if they see you holding hands with another woman, you get the lewd catcalls. They see a beautiful woman walking the streets and admire her from a distance, especially if she's clutching the arm of a man. They whisper amongst themselves, wistfully expressing how lucky that man got, for getting such a woman.

But if the same beautiful woman walks the street clutching the arm of another woman, she gets judging looks, as if she chose to be with the wrong person. And the onlookers throw her looks that pierce more hurtfully than daggers, because their looks tell her that she made the wrong decision in life and she needs to be rescued from this sort of situation. I wonder what sort of situation the woman needs to be rescued from: lesbianism? Or love?

Or perhaps she needs to be rescued away from this society that thinks she is a second-class citizen based on who she decides to love. And homophobia leaves her societal passport an indelible ink mark that's hard to erase, unless you tear out the pages. As good-natured advocates, we sometimes approach this by trying to carefully erase those marks: we dialogue, we set fine examples, we lobby for legal protection, we ally with supporters from the dominant hegemony, we come in peace.

But indeed, there are times when we need to tear away the pages, hard, in order for the indelible ink markers to see that sometimes, we don't take things sitting down. After all, this is how all of this "gay pride" things got started in New York in the first place, when self-identifying drag queens and other queers defended themselves from constant police harassment some 46 years ago in a [series of riots](#). Sometimes, venom really needs to be fought with venom as well. Peaceful revolutions could happen, as our own country's history [witnessed](#), but sometimes there are revolutions that need to happen in other ways. After all, will you sit idly when a snake bites you hard and its venom starts coursing through your veins, intending to reach your heart and brain to kill you? What do you do?

More so, what do *they* want *us* to do, when they spit that venom of theirs to us, sit quietly and take it, laugh it off, even? Honey, sometimes we're not that kind. When someone does the same thing to you, I wonder if you will be equally kind.

Sometimes, though, I wonder how their venom got formulated in the first place, these haters, how their perspectives about lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgenders and queers got poisoned along the way. I'm sure they weren't born with this, like how we're born without the concept of love or hate ingrained in our systems. Who and what altered their chemicals? More so, when and how?

And it's not about walking the streets and carrying a defensive stance. Sometimes, you mind your own business and do your own thing in your own corner of the world, but people [make it their business](#) to trample on your thing even if they don't really belong in your corner of the world.

In an office, a gay man could quietly exist in his cubicle and work diligently, but homophobic officemates will make him the subject of office gossip which could balloon into people having a negative view of him. What will the boss say? More importantly, how does being gay affect his work ethics and productivity? If it doesn't, then what's the business of these people gossiping about his sexual orientation? I guess it's the same kind of business they afford a macho officemate upon the discovery that he has a mistress or two. But is it really that simple?

In a school, a lesbian teacher could be quietly excelling at teaching the future citizens of the country, yet homophobic school administrators and parents would deem her a bad influence to their children once they found out that she has a girlfriend. Soon, seemingly non-harmful words like "values" or "morals" or "ethics" would be thrown at her as each is speared with the dart of their venomous homophobia. Why do some people find that necessary to do to us?

Sometimes I don't know what society wants from us, or how society wants us to behave. Will a peaceful coexistence ever happen? Will this venom called homophobia ever get depleted? I certainly wish that instead of the ozone layer, it's society's homophobia that gets eradicated over time. For in the end, maybe we have to ask those that carry it: who are you poisoning, really?

And in the meantime, for some of us who do get tired, it's also our basic human right to take a rest. //

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