

# Wide Stance: Do not let your anger over the Orlando massacre go to waste

"I'm a believer; I believe in prayer. Prayer is not enough."

[DeRay Mckesson](#), the 30-year-old Black Lives Matter activist and former candidate for mayor of Baltimore, spoke solemnly to the crowd of hundreds gathered in an outdoor event space on North Avenue during the last hours of daylight of Monday. "This trauma has to mean that we live differently."

Like queer folks across the nation, I spent Sunday an absolute mess. Unlike Mckesson, I am not a believer in prayer, so I alternated between crying and shaking my head as I cycled through the terrible news on social media. I could not eat. I could not write. I could not get out of bed, and when I finally did, I failed at my attempt to be in public and quickly returned home. I didn't want to see anyone smiling just hours after over a hundred LGBTQ+ people were shot in an Orlando gay club. I didn't want to think anyone was able to function after such an event. I know that this will hurt the feelings of some readers, but I didn't want to see or hear from a single straight person that morning.

On Monday night, [I joined hundreds of others at a candlelight vigil](#) here in Baltimore to honor the lives of and mourn the loss of those killed and injured during the mass shooting. Local elected officials and candidates made their appearances, LGBTQ+ leaders offered their anger and their condolences, singers sang and poets reflected. One theme that seemed common among most of the speakers was some reflection of Mckesson's words, "this trauma has to mean that we live differently."

If you need to pray, pray. The mourning process is important, and each of us needs to find our own way to stay mentally healthy after a tragedy like this. Have no regrets about putting life on pause to work through the emotion felt in response to this violence, but once we are done grieving, we need to get back to work. We need to allow the outrage and disbelief we feel to be sculpted into action, and we must do everything we can to prevent something like this from happening again. We are all free to find our own ways to do so, but for those looking for some appropriate channels for your grief, here are some options to consider.

## **Cultural Change**

Start with conversations. Anti-LGBTQ+ violence is about homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny. This week the press revealed that [the shooter frequented Pulse](#), and that he met several of the club's patrons on a gay and bisexual men's hookup app. Whether he was casing his victims, or he himself attracted to men, these facts do not remove the element of homophobia, they complicate them. Many LGBTQ+ people experience homophobia and transphobia of some

sort on a daily basis, and it can become deeply engrained in our actions and our ways of thinking, sometimes from the outside in, and sometimes in internalized ways.

So start speaking up. When your uncle wants to start a transphobic conversation over a family dinner. Speak up. Tell him about how frequently transgender people, transgender women of color especially, experience violence and harassment. When your co-workers or friends make jokes that suggest that being LGBTQ+ is unfavorable, ask them what they think is so funny. Talk to your parents. Talk to your children. If your religious congregation engages in homophobia or transphobia, ask yourself if that is an institution that you want to align yourself with. Don't let these trespasses slip. Don't let homophobia, transphobia, or racism go unchecked, even when it seems benign. Casual use of "faggot" or "tranny" might not have pulled the trigger in the early hours of Sunday morning, but it does contribute to a culture that suggests that LGBTQ+ lives are worth less, that we are some sort of undesirable.

This is important for allies in particular. Not every LGBTQ+ person has the ability to speak up. We can still be fired in many places for being gay or transgender. Families still kick their children out on the street. Many churches still excommunicate their queer flock. We queer folk need allies to speak up when we can't, even when they think that we aren't listening.

When having these conversations, don't let anyone convince you that this is all about Islam. As we've seen over the last 15 years, there are those who will want to warp the anger that we feel—frustration that should be directed toward homophobia, transphobia, and this specific shooter—into Islamophobic hate. Do not allow them to. Do not allow anyone to leverage violence upon one marginalized minority into the oppression of another.

## **Legal Change**

Conversations are only the start though. Marriage equality meant a whole lot to many people, but it was not a solution to the barriers that most LGBTQ+ folks face on daily basis. There are still plenty of matters that need to be resolved through our legal processes to protect us as full citizens. The threat of being fired, or being denied housing, or being told that you aren't even allowed to pee away from home—these acts have cultural consequences. Familiarize yourself with the fact that we don't have adequate laws across the nation to protect queer folks from issues like these, and tell your elected officials that you demand that they support legislation like the [Equality Act](#), which aims to put nation-wide protections in place to prevent such discrimination.

Many people learned for the first time on Sunday that men who have sex with men still have a de facto ban on donating our blood when they heard the news that many members of Orlando's LGBTQ+ community were unable to donate following the tragedy. Though the outright, life-long ban that was in place since 1985 was changed last year, the policy that was put in its place still bars a vast majority of us: men who have sex with men can donate blood, but only if we haven't had sex with men in the last year. The D.C.-based community health center Whitman-Walker Health [has suggested](#) that the year-long deferral period is unnecessary, and that contemporary medicine could allow for as little as a 30-day period. Those interested in sounding off in opposition to this policy should consider reaching out to organizations like the [Gay Men's](#)

[Health Crisis](#), who advocate for reform of such policies, and who report on where candidates for major races land on this issue.

It is hard to pretend that this matter isn't one that also intersects with the matter of access to firearms. LGBTQ+ folks land on both sides of this issue, and groups like the gay gun advocacy group Pink Pistols are likely to disagree with me on this, but it matters that someone with the shooter's background—self-identified affiliations with terrorist organizations, a history of domestic violence, previous investigation by federal law enforcement—had little trouble acquiring a firearm designed to replicate the weapons used by U.S. service members. I know that there is nothing I can say that is going to change people's minds more than the now-routine massacres that take place across the nation, but for those who are already outraged, don't just passively support gun law reform: call and write your elected officials, from your city council member to your U.S. Senators, and tell them you support making access to such weapons difficult, if not impossible, for people like the shooter. Don't vote for candidates who do nothing. Even if you don't support this sort of legislative change, at least look at how retailers contribute to a culture of violence, and consider whether you are comfortable buying your sneakers and video games at the [largest retail firearms dealer in the nation](#).

## **Personal Support**

Finally, call your queer friends and family. Message us on social media. Ask us what we need. Let us know that you care that over 100 members of our tribe were shot. Remind us that you care about our lives. For some people, it is going to be difficult to understand the sort of emotional and psychic damage we experience when tragedies strike our community, but please be patient with us, and don't ignore, or excuse away, our anger and our sadness.

Whatever you do, don't let the outrage, the hurt, and the disbelief fade from your memory without doing something. We must do something. We have to live differently.  
"This trauma has to mean that we live differently."

*Wide Stance examines LGBTQ+ life, culture, and politics in queer Baltimore and beyond. Anthony Moll (@anthonywmoll) is a writer and educator who writes about books and all the queer stuff that's fit to click.*