

# OPINION: Men of Color deserve space in the Leather Community. ONYX provides it.

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**Earlier this summer, we addressed the lack of Black and POC representation in Bear spaces. A long overdue conversation — which hopefully has sparked numerous other conversations — was started within the Bear community. However, Bear spaces haven't been the only spaces within the larger LGBTQ community to fall short when it comes to proper representation of People of Color.**

Since April of 2016, I've been a member of the MidAtlantic chapter of a leather/kink/fetish organization called ONYX. I remember my first time going to International Mister Leather (IML) Week in Chicago, and overhearing a conversation between one of my ONYX brothers and a White guy who was also attending IML.

The guy asked a few questions about ONYX, including if he would be able to join. When it was told to him that he wouldn't be eligible for membership because he wasn't a Person of Color, the guy said, "I just don't understand why there needs to be division. Membership to any organization should be open to people of all races."

I didn't say anything; I just listened. And, after a few minutes, I came to the conclusion that I agreed with him. Yes, I agreed with the fact that membership to any organization should not be based on race, and everyone should have an equal opportunity to be a part of anything. However, there was one small part that he was missing: This has never been the case for people of color.

The reason why organizations like ONYX exist is because very limited safe space has been provided for People of Color in various aspects of the larger LGBTQ community, including Bear and Leather spaces. As my brother Dominion ONYX stated in last week's episode of the Bear World Podcast:

“ONYX is a leather fraternity for gay and bisexual men of color. That’s the long and short of it. ONYX itself was started in 1995. Our chapter in the Midatlantic, which covers DC, Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, parts of North Carolina, Delaware, etc., was founded in 2007. The organization was founded because there was not a place where people of color, particularly men of color, felt comfortable, supported and even safe within the larger kink and fetish community. That’s really the long and short of why this organization was founded and why it exists — to provide a safe space for people of color, particularly men of color, to have a safe space to explore their kinks and fetishes.”

Yes, White Leathermen, Leathermen of Color DO NOT always feel safe, comfortable or supported in spaces with you. Even if you feel you personally have not done anything in particular to make Men of Color feel unsafe or unwelcome, there are so many others who have and continue to do so.

Much of the White gay Leather community’s foundation seems wrapped ideas of violent, oppressive masculinity, such as uniforms fetishes that glorify Nazism and law enforcement, as well as the idea that men with Aryan features are more desirable, which seems to be not-so-subtly supported in many Leather spaces. So, when the community doesn’t seem to consider you when they create the spaces and make the rules, what do you? You create your own spaces and your own rules.

Men of Color in the Leather Community have had to attend Leather events and witness such tone deaf and deliberately triggering acts as on-stage race play, and even titleholders who audaciously and proudly sport their Nazi fetishes, never once considering that Jewish people and People of Color may feel threatened by any of this. These acts can legitimately be seen as acts of violence. But, for you, it’s just all about what makes you cum, right?

This isn’t an attack, White Leathermen, though many of you will think it is. And the problem goes far beyond just basic representation, although it also starts with basic representation. If there are no People of Color on your event planning committees or in your organizations, then there will always be blind spots. And not providing adequate space to People of Color is a way to ensure that your blinds spots are never noticed and, as a result, never challenged, addressed or corrected. It has become obvious that, for many, the goal is to silence and erase.

When speaking about what led him to ONYX, my brother Epic ONYX states:

“For those that are into kink, fetish and leather, you get there in this space and it’s everything that you can imagine under one roof. The first time I ever went to MAL (MidAtlantic Leather Weekend), there were so many people, and I was like ‘Oh my god, what is going on?’ There were people in leather, and rubber, and people with their ass cheeks out, and people looking like dogs and ponies — there was just a lot going on. But

then, for me, it was like — This is great, but I seem to be the only brown person in this room. And then I was like, ‘Oh wait! There’s a vein over here, and it looks a little brown.’ I followed that vein, and that’s how I ended up in the ONYX section.”



As stated in the article addressing White Bears earlier this summer, “Imagine walking into a space and seeing no one that looks like you.” This is not about beating a dead horse, it’s about finally addressing the dead horse. People of color are telling you that something is wrong. Will you finally address it? Until then, don’t wonder why organizations like ONYX are only open to Leathermen of Color.

**Listen to the full discussion with my ONYX brothers on the Bear World Podcast via the player below! You can also listen to the Bear World Podcast on [Spotify](#), [Apple Podcasts](#), or wherever good podcasts can be found!**