The Metamorphosis Essay, Research Paper

“Normal?”

In society today, there are many stereotypes and prejudices against people who do not fit into the “norms” of society. Society tends to regard these people as outsiders and therefore alienate them from many common social activities. One of the most prominent examples of people who suffer from this alienation are those with the HIV virus, more commonly known as AIDS. AIDS victims suffer through many of the same difficulties and discriminations as the main character in Franz Kafka’s short novel “The Metamorphosis.” Throughout “The Metamorphosis,” Gregor’s family serves to represent society, while Gregor himself serves as a direct representation of anyone who does not fit into the norms of society, in particular those people who suffer from AIDS.

In the beginning of “The Metamorphosis,” the main character, Gregor, is transformed into a bug overnight and soon learns the difficulty of not being “normal.” He learns to live in a way that does not disturb society, or even his own family. Prior to becoming a bug, Gregor was a hard working salesman who was under appreciated by his family. After his transformation, Gregor is neglected by his family, with the exception of Grete, and the family soon disregards Gregor as one of their own, just as society disregards people who are not “normal.” Gregor’s father can be compared to the abusive people in society. He is the dominant figure of the family and remains abusive throughout the story. The father’s aggressiveness is revealed in the beginning of the story when he knocks “gently, yet with his fist” (217) on Gregor’s door. Using his fist to knock on his son’s door implies a sense of urgency and aggressiveness in his character. While there are many abusive people in society, at the same time there are many people who are caring. Grete represents the caring people in society, but even the most caring people can become hateful. She takes on the responsibility of caring for Gregor and maintains that Gregor is still part of the family. However, as the story progresses she becomes irritated with Gregor and views him as a burden to the family.

Although having AIDS is not as obvious as being transformed into a bug, AIDS can cause the same devastating effects once it is revealed. The most common fear that people in society have of AIDS is interacting with someone who has the virus. Gregor experienced this same fear of interaction. This fear is most noticeable when Grete is playing the violin for the house guests. Gregor walks in to the living room and, after seeing Gregor, the house guests become upset because of the “disgusting conditions” (240) of the family. Another similarity between Gregor’s illness and AIDS is that there is no cure. Both Gregor and AIDS victims have to live knowing that they cannot change the way they are, which makes them indifferent towards their appearance. By revealing himself to the house guests, Gregor demonstrates this indifference and offends the guests.

Both Gregor and AIDS victims learn to live with the many limitations set forth by society. However, these limitations can be overwhelming and extremely exhausting at times. Through his family’s reaction, Gregor experiences a common theme in society today; if you are not considered normal by society’s standards, then you cannot live a normal life. In the end Gregor realizes that he cannot relieve the mental and physical strains of being a bug and decides that death is the only solution.