

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

Fearing No One Will Love You

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Imagine that almost everyone in the world is a gay man or lesbian, or claims to be. You unfortunately are not. You were born into a gay family. Your parents are two women, or two men, who love you very much, and are very proud of you. You love them too, and want them to be proud of you. These are the people who taught you to walk and to talk, to read, and to draw. When you were very sick, they stayed up all night in your bedroom. They walked you to your first day of school when you were young.

You have an older brother and an older sister who, in their early teens, both identified themselves as gay. Your older brother has a boyfriend with whom he holds hands on the street. Your sister has kissed her girlfriend in front of you.

Your parents, and your brother and sister, assume that you are gay, and want you to be gay. If you want them to stay proud of you, you need to bring home a same-sex love interest. How do you feel about that, and who do you tell how you feel?

At 14, you're heading to your first day of high school, listening to gay rap on your iPhone, walking with your best friend who is flirting with other gay teens. The school's faculty is all gay except for one guy who coaches the girl's field hockey team. And there's talk about the sophomore history teacher who never has a date at school social functions. There's also a straight-gay alliance for the handful of straight kids who either have come out or pretend to be gay allies. You stay clear of the field hockey coach, the sophomore history teacher, and the straight-gay alliance. You have questions, but the risk of exposure is too high.

Heterosexuals are tolerated, but not accepted. They're on television in small supporting roles, but they rarely kiss, and they never have love scenes. There are "breeder" web sites, YouTube videos, and chat rooms, but you're worried that if you go to them you'll be identified and caught. What if gay people hang out in chat rooms waiting to catch someone they know who's straight? You've seen what happens to kids suspected of being a breeder. You've heard about the nasty messages left on Facebook pages. Some such bullying has even resulted in suicides by straight teens.

You've always been a good kid: polite, generous, and even religious. But the messages you get from lots of people—politicians, ministers, school board members, radio hosts, and bloggers—is that if you're straight, deal with it, but don't push it in people's faces. How do you feel about that, and who do you tell how you feel?

To hide from bullies, and to keep the love of your family, you date a same-sex classmate. You hold their hand in public. You kiss them in front of your friends. You tell them you love them. You do actually like them. They just don't turn you on. You want to kiss someone of the other sex. You fantasize about having sex with them. But you can't tell anyone that, can you?

You know there are others like you out there. There are straight adults who live together, have kids of their own, and call themselves a "family." There are straight politicians who run for office, and sometimes win if there are lots of straight voters. There are straight movie and TV stars, and even a couple of church leaders, but the gay people who hate straight people seem to outnumber the gay people who like them. Straight people aren't wanted in some neighborhoods and in some churches. There's one gay minister who brings his family to straight funerals and pickets with signs that say, "God Hates Breeders" and "Breeders Burn in Hell."

Being straight makes you feel dirty, strange, and not normal. People tell you to get therapy, pray to God, [and] seek help converting to gay. How could your family ever love who you are?

You stay sane by risking exposure and joining a straight chat room. You look for YouTube videos that make you feel better about yourself.

You go to a college far away from home. You find out about a popular straight bar and after several tries, you finally get up the nerve to go in. You meet all kinds of straight people. Some you like. Some you don't. But they're your new family, and you feel at home. You meet some other kids from school there, join the Straight Pride Club, and come out to your gay roommate, who moves out, and you have a dorm room to yourself. Other students are now told you're straight, and they start looking at you differently, but you learn to deal with it. One way, is to push back with "Straight Pride" t-shirts, posters, and buttons.

You finally connect online with someone local. After a week of messages, you meet and hit it off. You're so excited about the connection that you want to tell everyone how happy you are. You feel whole. You feel completion when you kiss and make love. You feel normal. But can you tell your family, and how will they react?

You graduate and get a job. You and your new mate decide to keep your secret until you're sure you'll be safe at work and in your home. You get a two bedroom apartment and tell your folks that you're just sharing rent. You don't put the picture of the person you love on your desk at work. You don't bring your mate home for Thanksgiving. He or she is "just a friend" who has their own family. So, everyone at home and at work thinks you're single and need their help finding a gay date.

One day while you're at work, the person you most love in the world is in an accident and taken to the hospital. You learn this when a stranger answers your mate's cell phone. You rush to the hospital to be at your lover's side, but hospital policy prohibits non-family members from access to the Intensive Care Unit. What do you do? Do you tell the gay doctors and nurses that you're straight and the person they're taking care of is your lover, or do you sit outside and wait? How do you feel? Who do you call? Why are you so upset?