

# Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

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## Living a Picture-Perfect Life

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Each time we visit a foreign country, Ray and I bring home a culturally significant object as a remembrance of our trip. In Salzburg, we just bought a hand-crafted tableau of miniature figurines selling Christmas items in a lavishly decorated store. The very proud artisan explained that the heads and hands of the shopkeepers were carved from wax by a 90-year-old woman. The one-room store is picture-perfect in every romantic detail, including an elaborately decorated Christmas tree with candles, assorted wreaths with bows, teddy bears and multiple other children's toys, tiny colorful glass ornaments, and Victorian shopping bags.

The appeal to us of such a piece of art is its siren song of a perfect life. In this tableau, as well as in all of the real life rooms I decorate at home, and sometimes admire by peeking through my own windows, there is a search for storybook comfort, peace, and happiness. I do the same with the table decorations for holiday and birthday celebrations. The goal is to have Ray, me, and our friends wander into a world we hoped was real as children, and long for as adults.

Regrettably, I have tried to do the same romantic sculpting with my friends. I figured that if I worked hard enough at making everything fit a beautiful script, we might all enjoy relationships that were picture-perfect, filling us with comfort, peace, and happiness. But people can't be glued into place as tiny teddy bears can be in a miniature tableau. Friends don't like their lives to be scripted by others for roles they're unable or unwilling to play. However, what they sometimes miss when they start moving the furniture of the relationship around, is that they had also scripted me in a role. We all do it, some knowingly, and some not.

Another special gift that Ray and I bring home from each of our travels is the renewed awareness that no matter where you go in the world, people are the same, and always have been. Most especially with our yearning for a life of comfort, peace, and happiness, everyone seems to read or listen to children's stories with hope, and to create miniature tableaux as adults in which everything is in order, including people and the parts they play in our lives. We want our gods to be powerful and merciful; our parents to be model nurturers; our political leaders to be honest and trustworthy; our children to be mirrors of our perfection; our friends to be loyal, appreciative, and generous; our workers to put in a full day's labor for their wages, and to whistle while they work. These are our storybook worlds in which we think a little glue can keep everything in place.

The prince archbishops of Austria, we learned (and all other wealthy, powerful people in history it seems) created for themselves churches, palaces, and dining tables that we now look at through their windows, or through plexiglass protectors, in the vain hope of experiencing the perfect life of comfort, peace, and happiness. But even with all of their power and wealth, no one was able to get all of the people in their lives to be and do what they wished for. Their parents and children weren't perfect, their workers were unhappy, their friends were disloyal and unappreciative, and their gods were disappointments.

The leadership of all minority groups, designated by salary or acclimation, have picture-perfect tableaux in mind, too. When they imagine how they want themselves and the rest of the world to see the lives of their people, they have romantic notions. All black men are good fathers. All Latino Americans are trying to learn English. All women think for themselves. All people with disabilities want to be independent. All Muslims reject violence. All gay men are sexually mature adults. But there's not enough glue in the world to keep everyone in place in the romantic worlds we create for ourselves and for others to see.

If we want a life of comfort, peace, and happiness, we need to accept the perfection of life's imperfections and that of people too. That doesn't mean that we should try to incorporate all elements of life and all other people into our daily living. It's okay to try to incorporate into your world the elements that bring you joy. Sometimes people have to leave or be taken out of your tableau, but that is how it has always been. Sometimes you also have to change the setting of the tableau. The sight of a shop that sells Christmas toys isn't always going to satisfy us. What matters is that we be the artisans of our own lives. It doesn't matter if the wax head of a favorite figure melts because it gets too close to the light. What's important is that we take responsibility for continuing to create worlds that bring us comfort, peace, and happiness.