

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

Sick of Stereotypes

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Gratefully, all of the award programs are over. Our American royalty has gone back to their very private homes. Many of them are secure in their status as stars. They are the beautiful people whose money and notoriety give them privileges equal to those of the Old World's former royal families. Like the commoners of days long past, some of us today line the streets to see our royalty arrive at, and depart from, their exclusive gatherings, and we hope they will stop for a moment to talk to us.

I would not have been a good commoner in the Old World where others were considered gods. While I admit that I would get excited if a movie or television personality sat next to me on an airplane, I'm not comfortable with my interest in a person whose notoriety is more important than his or her values.

I'm reading the series of books, *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R. R. Martin, perhaps better known to television viewers as *A Game of Thrones*. The series of books is not based on fact, but the descriptions of life in a kingdom remind us that the celebrities of the past were very different from our American royalty. The nobility of the Old World were often homely, fat, physically and morally weak, had physical disabilities, and weren't the brightest lights in the chandelier.

There is no diversity among the celebrities of the present. Leading men and women are generally white, assumed to be straight and physically attractive by today's standards. In the past, actors were often pelted with rotten tomatoes. The lineage of a person was far more important than the hump on his back. And having a lord with such a deformity might help spare ridicule of the common child with a hump. Role models were different.

As is true in the world of television, today films don't generally star people with Down syndrome, little people, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, black, Asian, Native American, or Latino/a people, those with disabilities, or people who aren't perfectly muscled, and beautiful by today's standards.

Some of us can come up with exceptions to the rule, but they are exceptions. Personally, I'm tired of watching films and television programs in which gay men are included as the funny sidekick with no love life. When Ray goes through the list of options of films to download, or television programs to watch, my criteria includes "Does it have a leading man who is gay?"

Is it too much to want to see a superstar who is gay, and who kisses another man passionately on a program? *Torchwood* is the only television series I've seen that offered such a gay hero. But most straight men won't watch such programming, so the networks and producers know there's no money to be made. Instead, we gay people see ourselves portrayed with increasing frequency as best friends to the beautiful, straight star because straight men and women find gay, sexless sidekicks acceptable.

If I were black, I would be sick to death of seeing myself portrayed in film and on television as an angry, jiving man, or a head-bobbing, sassy woman. As a white man, I'm sick of those black stereotypes, and I have to keep reminding myself that they are stereotypes. I see Latino men portrayed as having tattoos, living in the barrio, and running drugs. I see lesbians as tough, single cops. Little people are supposed to be funny or cute elves. Peter Dinklage in *A Game of Thrones* is the clever, sexually-charged exception. Native Americans are portrayed as drunk and beyond the reach of the law on their reservations. Chinese people are either criminals or dry cleaners. Transsexuals are usually in awful outfits standing on street corners waiting for a trick.

When will Matt Bomer, the handsome gay star of the television series *White Collar*, walk down the Red Carpet with his husband and kids, and be asked about his nomination for best actor in the film about the two gay American soldiers who make love after saving their platoon from death?

The media is the major educator of the day. We believe what we are taught by television and motion pictures. If we want to think of each other as equally beautiful expressions of nature, we need to be more accurately portrayed on television and in film. I'm sick of the stereotypes. They increase bullying among young people, and depression among adults. I want every person who is gay, little, black, Latino/a, Native American, Asian, transgender, or was born with Down syndrome to see themselves as royalty, as stars who deserve to be admired and appreciated.