

# Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

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## The Lovers, the Dreamers, and Me

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Four gay men in their forties and sixties, from the United States and France, sang in our living room with Kermit the Frog, "Someday we'll find it, the Rainbow Connection, the lovers, the dreamers, and me."

Jean-Marc and Patrice had watched the Muppets as children 30 years ago in eastern and southern France. As they sat with Ray and me, with bowls of homemade popcorn, they excitedly named the characters as they appeared in the film, *The Muppets*: Fozzie Bear, Gonzo, Animal, and Swedish Chef. Ray and I were delighted to share that experience, which transcended language and culture.

Patrice, being a song and dance man, knew all of the lyrics to Kermit's closing song: "I've heard it too many times to ignore it. There's something that I'm supposed to be. Someday we'll find it, the Rainbow Connection, the lovers, the dreamers, and me."

That morning, Patrice was horrified to learn that a gunman had killed Jewish children near the town in which he had watched *Sesame Street*. He had been on the telephone with his mother and sister who still live in the area. At the same time, I received a request for help from a friend who had been asked to testify against a coach who openly harassed gay athletes and students. Immediately after watching the film, I got another e-mail regarding a gay man who was being discriminated against at work because he made others feel "uncomfortable."

Where is the disconnect between children across the world singing *The Rainbow Connection*, but not seeing that the black, Jewish, gay, Latino, and transgender people who upset them are just Fozzie Bear, Gonzo, Animal, the Swedish Chef, Kermit, and Miss Piggy, all hoping to find in life what they're supposed to be?

Even if they have never seen the Muppets, or heard Kermit sing *The Rainbow Connection*, there's not a person in this world who hasn't heard the voice that calls them to be him—or herself. Half of our life's job is to follow the inner voice that pulls us out of our closets of fear. The second half of our life's work is to embrace the rainbow connection between everyone else in the world who is struggling to do the same thing.

I don't know why it surprised me so much that our French friends shared the Muppets with us as a childhood experience. I'm now more aware that the Jewish children who were just killed in France watched the same television programs that Muslim children do. They sang the same songs. They laughed at the same funny stories. Why is it that Fozzie Bear makes all of us smile, but other human beings can make us so angry and hateful that we kill them?

The New Hampshire Legislature just voted to continue to allow Kermit and Miss Piggy to get married. "Oh, no," you might protest, "the vote was about homosexuals." Technically, that's true, but

in reality it was about allowing characters who are different from the majority to enjoy the same joys as the majority. The fear of difference didn't dominate the day.

If you told the lone gunman in France that he wasn't killing Jewish children, but rather that he was killing the muppet Gonzo, would his reaction to his actions be different? The college coach who says that the only people who are upset by her homophobia are racists and gay people, seems never to have found the Rainbow Connection.

None of us have the ability to avoid the harsh realities of life that exist outside of a children's television program or film. Almost everywhere we look, and almost everything we hear in the media, creates in us the feeling that we are not safe. That is why we are made nervous by the presence at work of someone who is different. Ignorance is the parent of fear. Fear is the parent of hatred. We constantly are called upon to fight off the instinct to fear, and to hate. And more of us succeed than don't.

Given all of the challenges we each face daily to be open to new interactions with people who are different from us, I feel that most people throughout the world do a pretty good job of seeing the Rainbow Connection. We have our moments when we want to lash out and punish the people who frighten us, but we're held back by our memories of bears, pigs, frogs, chickens, and other assorted characters loving each other, and being happy. "The lovers, the dreamers, and me." We live and work everywhere.