

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

Menacing Closeted Gay People

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Please raise your hand if you think that Dharun Ravi, the Rutgers student accused of driving his gay roommate to suicide, is a closeted homosexual. To me, he's a classic example of men who cover their preoccupation with their own homosexuality by condemning it in others.

"Keep the gays away," he wrote in an e-mail; translated, that means, "Keep homosexuality away from me, because if my parents find out they'll hate me." Train your web cam on your roommate's sex life in order to see how many of your friends are disgusted with what you truly want to have in your own life.

When I graduated from college, I was a conscientious objector to the war in Vietnam and served my alternative service at the Catholic newspaper in Detroit. I was afraid of coming right out and acknowledging my homosexuality, but I would hint at it in my weekly column.

There was a man on our small staff of six people who was an alcoholic, closeted, gay man who showed up late at work every day smelling of booze. He was sarcastic, and had a cutting wit. He knew that I knew about him. I knew that he knew about me. He was fired for incompetence, and shortly thereafter I started the Detroit chapter of Dignity, and came out in the national media.

"Faggot! Faggot! Faggot!" he yelled at me from his parked car as I left work the day after the news broke. "You think you're so special. You're just a faggot!"

Such open hostility from one homosexual to another, at least in the United States, is less common today, with the exception of people like Fred Phelps, the Baptist minister who carries signs that say, "God Hates Fags," Paul Cameron, who made up research that said the average gay man dies in his mid-forties because of his "lifestyle," and some of the other vitriolic male leaders of the anti-gay movement. Ken Mehlman, George Bush's campaign manager, and architect of his anti-gay marriage positions, has just apologized for being the closeted, gay man behind that heterosexist rhetoric.

Not every male who dislikes gay men, or who thinks we ought not to have the same rights as heterosexuals do, is gay. But the ones who devote too much time to the issue are. Videotaping your roommate having sex with another man, and then blasting it on the Internet, is a sign to me of fear of one's own sexuality. But more common today is the seething resentment toward gay men and women who are happy. The animosity or outright homophobia comes out when the self-hating gay men have had too much to drink. That's when the words "faggot," "queer," and "homo" start appearing more often in their sentences. But the person needn't be drunk in order for others to pick up on their dis-ease with their being gay, and with other gay people being happy. Any sign of "attitude" suggests there is a lack of self-love.

Heterosexism is the value system that asserts being heterosexual is more normal, and more preferred than being homosexual. It's like racism and sexism and all of the other "isms." Believing that what you are is less valued by the universe or nature creates manifestations of resentment. But just as angry, poor, black people traditionally burn down their own neighborhoods instead of those of wealthy white people, our gay heterosexism targets our rage at our own gay people rather than at those heterosexuals we see as more "normal."

Raise your hand if every time you read a headline about sex with minors you assume it's an adult man having sex with a young boy. That's our heterosexism. Statistically, it will more often be an adult male on a young female.

Raise your hand if you assume that kids who kill their classmates are gay. That's heterosexism. Gay kids are more likely to kill themselves.

Ray and I joined our friends, Jim and Peter, at a matinee performance of a play a couple of days ago, and during the intermission I started talking to a couple of guys whom I suspected were gay. One of them was fluffing the plastic plants in the lobby garden. I said, "It takes a gay man to make plastic plants look pretty."

His companion eyed me, and said, "How do you know he's gay?"

I replied, "Because he's with you."

"What if we're brothers?" he said.

"Then you should read my latest book, *Are You Guys Brothers?*"

That led to a discussion of relationships. I pointed to Ray and said, "We've been together for 36 years."

One replied, "I haven't been with anyone longer than 36 days."

The other man confessed, "I don't know what love is. I've heard others describe it, but I've never known it."

As I headed back into the theater with my friends, who have also been together for many, many years, I thought about what conditions in one's home would deprive a gay child from knowing and feeling love. Knowing the meaning of love begins with feeling love of self, and then believing that who you are is just as beautiful and natural as anyone else.

Without a family that loves you for being gay, you may end up filming your gay roommate make love, and then saying, "Keep the gays away." Or you just may go through life as an angry gay person.