

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

We, the Abused & the Abusers

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Is there a person who has never been abused in some way by others, or a person who has never participated in the abuse of another person? It would make it easier for all of us to empathize if we could recall the moments when our bodies or our spirits were roughly handled. When we are abused, it leaves a wound that never fully heals. Abuse creates fear, anger, and other destructive feelings. When we abuse others, we're fully responsible for the damage we do.

To "abuse" means to "use wrongly or improperly; to injure by maltreatment." Some abuse is major, such as being tortured. Other abuse, such as being shoved as others exit the subway car, has less long-lasting impact. Both, however, are an assault on our sense of safety and wellbeing.

I have both been abused, and have been an abuser. I've been physically beaten, sexually mistreated, threatened with death, and bullied with hate mail. I've also repeated or cultivated negative stories about others when it served my selfish purposes.

The current Pope was abused as a child when he was forced to join a Nazi youth corps, and he has been an abuser, most recently in minimizing the life work of nuns, and the dignity of gay people.

We are all aware of the abuse of water-boarding. Gay people who were given electric shock treatment so that they might become straight were abused in a major way, too. We think of others being abused, and of others doing the abusing, but rarely do we see ourselves in the role of the abuser. Yet, gossip is abuse, as is withholding compliments. Not making eye contact with people you feel are less worthy is abuse, as is aggressive driving and horn honking. Refusing to talk with another person is abuse, as is refusing to listen. We abuse others with our angry outbursts, our profanity, our Bible quoting, and our unwanted solicitation telephone calls.

If I'm denied what is due me, or subjected to what is unwanted, it is abuse. If you think about it, all of us participate in some form of abuse every day.

We abuse ourselves. Drinking too much alcohol or taking unnecessary drugs is abuse, as are crash diets and running with a bad knee. Eating more than is sufficient is abuse, as is pretending that we have no connection with people who are hungry.

We abuse animals when we aren't responsible caretakers, and we abuse the earth when we litter, which Ray and I won't do, or leave all the lights on in the house, which Ray and I do. We abuse the earth when we leave the water running, and otherwise take more from it than is necessary.

When I read about corporations and individuals figuring out ways not to pay their fair share of taxes, I feel they are abusing the country they claim to love. During every election cycle, the airwaves and print media are filled with the abuse of political opponents. Rush Limbaugh is paid lots of money to

abuse other people with his diatribes. His sponsors and listeners are as responsible for the abuse as he is.

The young men and women who have been sent to Iraq and Afghanistan to fight the "War Against Terrorism" have been horribly abused by our politicians, and by all of us who have not stepped forward to stop the physical and emotional carnage. The broken bodies and spirits of our youth, and of the people living in the war zones, will all be forgotten after we have officially withdrawn from these Middle Eastern countries. We may say, "Thank you," but then hope those with artificial limbs won't show up at the supermarket and scare our children. I saw that happen during and after the War in Vietnam. All is forgotten except by those whose nightmares keep them awake.

Spousal abuse is one of the most horrifying forms of mistreatment, because love is promised to the person who is physically or emotionally traumatized. The person who seeks safety and comfort becomes a possession of the abuser, to be treated as he or she wishes.

I recently finished a book about gay male spousal abuse. The younger of the two men sought security in the company of the more experienced older gay man, and put up with abuse because he didn't know that he wasn't supposed to be beaten up in the gay world. The people, who denied him the opportunity to learn about the goodness of his sexual orientation, and the option of dating someone of the same sex in high school, were his abusers too. They created the circumstances that allowed for the abuse in his first relationship.

A lot of the examples we can give of daily abuse are signs of self-centeredness and selfishness. I know that when I abuse others it is because I am thinking only of myself. More serious examples of abuse are often signs of mental and emotional illness. Spiritually healthy people don't want themselves or others to suffer. Love and abuse are opposites. If we love ourselves, and our neighbors throughout the world, we can't engage in behaviors that assault safety and wellbeing.