

## Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

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### **Gay, Schmay, So What's to Like?**

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Some people hate being gay. Gay, schmay, so what's to like? My guess is that the same can be said of people who are black, Latino, Asian, Irish, Polish, Catholic, Evangelical, Jewish, or who have a disability. They look at the behavior of their own people and they are embarrassed.

Though I love and fully embrace my life as a gay man, not everyone who is gay does, nor does every lesbian, bisexual, or transgender person love and embrace their true identity. We can label it internalized homophobia/transphobia if we want, or dismiss them as religious fanatics, but in doing so we're missing the many people who see the way some of us behave and want no part of it.

One formerly married man wrote, "I've been around too many gay men, have seen how they act, what they feel is important to discuss [the gay thing continually], the leering at waiters, the flirting, the silliness, effeminate behaviors, their snits and unwillingness to forgive or not carry grudges for life—on and on and on. It's not for me."

When I wrote back and asked if I might quote him, he said, "I made some rather sweeping generalizations about some of the gay men I've known, unfortunately enforcers of the stereotypes, but good guys otherwise. Still, my comfort in being around them waned over time as I was often embarrassed in public by their behaviors. I don't think it's necessary to give a friend a soul kiss when greeting him in a restaurant. Showing off."

What this gay man experienced with other gay men is not unusual, and his reaction is not out of the ordinary, although extreme. He chooses not to want to be gay because of what he associates with being gay. What he doesn't realize is that there are very few gay men who aren't embarrassed by the behavior of other gay men. I suspect that the same is true for lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people, as well as for Texans. Some of the adolescent, sexually obsessed, alcohol- and drug-focused social behavior I see in the gay male community I excuse because of youth or late starts in life. But at some point I feel in my heart, "Please grow up. You're embarrassing yourself, and throwing your life away."

That last statement of mine suggests that I believe life has a purpose. What I believe is that life is an opportunity to mature into the best possible specimen of ourselves that we can. It's nature's way. We all scratch our heads in confusion when a pod of whales beach themselves and die. Why not swim? That's how many of us feel when we see our own breed do destructive things to themselves. Why choose death?

One friend of mine was a brilliant and very successful attorney who could easily have been elected to a position of political authority. But, after he achieved a high level of acknowledgement in the corporate world, he decided to play fulltime and ended up in a drug-induced, sex-obsessed stupor for most of his forties. Luckily, he survived the ordeal and has crawled back to mental and physical

health, but if you were gay and trying to decide to accept yourself, and you met this man in that state, you too might well have decided being gay wasn't for you.

This refusal to accept self because of the immature and extremely childish and self-centered behavior you see in others is significant to all of us for a few important reasons. The first is that such people are the ones considered "successes" by the Religious Right. They say, "See how this man (or woman) left the life of sin? You can, too." What they don't understand, nor does the homosexual who doesn't want to be gay, is that the person hasn't changed his or her orientation; they've just denied it.

The second significant reason this dynamic of denial is worthy of our attention is that these men and women who don't want to be gay don't show up on our census reports or guesstimates of the numbers of people who are gay. The man who wrote me about the embarrassing silliness of his friends' behaviors would never identify as gay in a poll. In reality, there are thousands of men who love having sex with men, but won't identify as gay because they fear doing so will make them become something scary that neither their family nor they would recognize.

A third important reason for us to pay attention to this phenomenon is that there are many brilliant lives being wasted in the feeble attempt to find gay identity in the worst possible places. We become like the people with whom we surround ourselves. If all of our friends are active alcoholics or drug abusers, we too will become active alcoholics or drug abusers. If our friends define their manhood by how many times they have sexually scored, we too will do the same. And then, one day, we'll look in the mirror and not recognize ourselves, and perhaps beach ourselves with the rest of the pod.

Do I want the table full of gay men who are laughing in the restaurant as they leer at the male waiter and make fifth-grade penis references to stop doing so in order that I might be more comfortable, or so that other gay men might have an easier time accepting their true nature? No. I want them to have fun together. I actually enjoy watching them have a good time. But it's not a table that I necessarily want to sit at. And I want the guys at that table to be focused on the direction they are choosing to take their lives.

Gay, schmay, so what's to like? It all depends on the choices you make. Denying who and what you are will never bring you happiness, regardless of whom and what you are. And rather than wag fingers of disgust at others of our kind whose behaviors we think prevent maturity, it is better to show them with our own choices how to avoid group suicide.