

What If I Were Straight?

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I don't wallow in my own oppression, but the recent vicious hate crime in Hamilton against a gay man has me, a queer woman, examining my "outcast state" in our society.

Being queer, a woman, a media professional, a vocalist, an activist, a Trekkie, a Hamiltonian are just some of the many defining factors, which collectively make me who I am.

But if I took away my queer identity what about me would be different?

First, I never would have had to come out of the closet. As a straight person I would never have that "Eureka" moment when I suddenly realize that I'm a HETEROSEXUAL! I would never have sat down my parents while holding their hands and say:

"Mom. Dad. I have something to tell you. I know this will be tough for you to accept. Heck, it's tough for me to accept, but I am sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex. I finally know who and what I am and I hope you won't love me any less because of it. I am straight."

Second, as a straight person I would never have to decide how "out" I want to be as a heterosexual. I have never heard a straight person ever have any of the following conversations:

Scenario #1 - A heterosexual couple having a romantic evening at a classy restaurant

Boyfriend: I love you. (Reaches in to kiss and embrace his girlfriend.)

Girlfriend: (Pulls away from his affections.) Not here.

Boyfriend: Why not?

Girlfriend: Someone might see us. I don't feel safe openly displaying my feelings for you here. Plus I think I saw some co-workers at another table and they don't know that I'm straight.

Scenario #2 – A straight person at Straight Pride Week

“Wow! My first straight pride festival ever! I finally don't feel so alone anymore. There are so many of us straights here, and so many people supporting us. It's so cool! But I don't think I'm ready to march in the parade. I don't want all these people to see me or have the media take my picture. I'm not ready for the whole world to know that I'm straight.”

Scenario #3 – A heterosexual couple open a new business in the community

Wife: I want to put a “straight as an arrow” sticker in the front window.

Husband: I don't want people to think that our business is a straight business. What if we lose customers because they know we are straight?

Wife: I want to support our straight community and let people know that we are a straight owned and positive business. I was even thinking about being a sponsor for Straight Pride this year.

Husband: Couldn't we wait until our business becomes a bit more established and then we can take the risk of outing ourselves and our business?

Third, if I were straight I would never have felt the need to join groups that provide support, political action and solidarity on straight issues. As a heterosexual I wouldn't feel isolated. Hence I wouldn't be inspired to seek out and connect with my straight brothers and sisters and fight for acceptance.

If there was a straight support group in this city, perhaps this is how the facilitator would start off the meeting:

“Welcome to SWOH - Straight Women of Hamilton. This group has existed for several years as a place to gather with people that we know are straight. It is a place for mixing, mingling and having fun. Some of the issues we talk about are the privileges we enjoy because of our straight status, how to avoid gay people and finding the right man. Confidentiality is never an issue since you're always in the majority. Remember that what is said here, can be said anywhere. Spread

the straight message. If you meet someone from SWOH somewhere else, welcome them openly."

Fourth, if I were straight, organizations and individuals wouldn't proactively campaign to keep me from enjoying my basic human rights and freedoms. I wouldn't have people insist that I not be included in hate crime legislation because their sacred texts risk being censored. I wouldn't have to be told that civil unions, a "separate but equal" institution, which provide most of the same benefits as marriage but with a different name, are better. I wouldn't be affected by systematic oppression, because I would be "normal" and I would never worry that what makes me different will cause me to lose my job, family, friends, home, faith group or community.

Finally, if I were straight I would never live with the fear of being attacked physically, verbally, emotionally or systematically because of whom I love. I would never worry about being targeted as I walk out of a well-known straight establishment. I would never wonder if I should tone down my "straightness" in certain circles to avoid being discriminated against. I wouldn't be made to feel worthless, have my intimate relationships denigrated or simply be dismissed as an aberration that doesn't truly exist.

Yet, despite all of this, I know that if I was straight, I would be missing a very essential part of what makes me, well, me. I am queer. I not only accept my queer identity. I revel in it.

Why?

Because, my life long exploration of my sexual self has given me a very unique perspective on life and the world around me. I strongly believe my queer identity has helped me define relationships, love, intimacy and sexuality in much broader terms. I've been able to witness and experience a wider diversity of intimate human relationships - a diversity I likely would never have considered if I were straight.

It's our differences that make humankind so rich. If we were all straight, life would be very boring. And if I had the power to do it all over again, I still wouldn't wish I had been born straight rather than queer.