



## **Not So Gay: Differences between KOTs and Children with LGB/Q parents**

People with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer parents share many similarities and differences. Our families are unique, but we find a certain commonality in our experiences. People with transgender parents have a lot in common with people with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or queer parents. There are, however, some specific aspects of having a transgender parent that other COLAGErs do not experience. It is important for us to acknowledge the distinct experiences of certain segments of our community in order to better understand each other and celebrate the diversity of all queerspawn.

- **Sexual orientation vs. Gender identity.** Gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer identity is based on sexual orientation, or the gender that someone is attracted to. Everyone has a sexual orientation. Transgender identity is based on gender identity, or one's own understanding of being a man, a woman, or another gender. Everyone has a gender identity. A person's gender identity is almost always visible (even if their gender identity is sometimes or often misinterpreted by others), but a person's sexual orientation is not always visible. Whereas sexual orientation affects a parent's relationship to potential partners, a parent's gender identity impacts how they relate to the world at large. A parent's sexual orientation and a parent's gender identity thus impact their children in different ways. (For example, if I am in public with my gay parent, people may not know that they are gay. Whereas if I am in public with my transgender parent, people may suspect that their gender expression differs from their assigned sex.)

- **Societal Awareness and Acceptance.** Gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer people have made incredible progress over the last few decades in increasing visibility and acceptance in society. Transgender people have also made progress, but have been less visible and less accepted than gay and lesbian people. While transgender people are becoming more visible, the fact that they have children is less widely known. In contrast, most Americans are aware that gay and lesbian people may have children. Visibility for our families can also be challenging within the LGBTQ community - for example, a family of two women and two children is easily read as a queer family whereas transgender parents might be read as (or identify as) straight, sometimes complicating our access to LGBTQ community.

- **Legal Protections.** Gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer people have more legal protections than transgender people. Many states have anti-discrimination and hate crimes laws regarding sexual orientation, but not gender identity and expression. Depending on the state, transgender parents can also face immense challenges in court custody cases, leaving children vulnerable to being taken away from or legally estranged from a parent.

- **Transition.** Many people with transgender parents witness their parent's transition from one gender to another. A parent may change their pronouns, name, appearance, and mannerisms during the transition. This may be a major challenge for KOTs, who go through a transition of their own in relation to their transitioning parent. As we witness our parent change their gender, we may grieve the loss of our parent's former self. We struggle with understanding and/or re-establishing our relationship to our parent as they become who they need to be. There are also assumptions about surgeries, hormones and other medical states of transgender people. As KOTs, we are often forced to hear or answer invasive questions about the medical processes, genitalia or other details about our parents.

- **Pronouns and Naming.** We are taught that mothers are women and fathers are men. Having a transgender parent challenges this assumption. KOTs may call their mother 'he' or their father 'she'. Adjusting to new pronouns takes practice, so when a parent transitions, switching pronouns can be a big challenge. Some parents change their name, as well, to reflect their new identity. A parent who transitions from female to male may no longer want to be called "Mom" in public. Children often relearn how to refer to their transgender parent in ways that feel comfortable for both the parent and the child.

- **Transphobia in the LGBTQ Community.** As people with transgender parents, KOTs often encounter transphobia in the world. Sometimes, lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer people are transphobic toward our families or other transgender people. Just because someone is LGBTQ (or has an LGBTQ parent) does not necessarily mean that they understand transgender issues. Even in gay-friendly spaces, we may hear negative comments about drag queens or other trans folks. You can respond to these comments by reminding people that many LGBTQ people are often targeted for their gender expression, which is the basis of discrimination against transgender people, too.

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