



## PERSPECTIVES *for a* DIVERSE AMERICA

# Families Like Mine: Children of Gay Parents Tell It Like It Is

The book *Families Like Mine: Children of Gay Parents Tell It Like It Is* was written by Abigail Garner and published in 2004.

[In her nonfiction book, Abigail Garner demystifies the coming out process for LGBT parents and children using their voices and experiences. This excerpt focuses on the impact of coming out in the school environment with teachers, peers, and other parents.]

New LGBT parents often say that they thought they were as out as they could be – until they had children. Having children means that LGBT people are continually explaining their family to new teachers, doctors, day-care workers, religious leaders, and the parents of their children’s friends. The ongoing coming-out process extends to us children as well. They also have to make daily choices about if and how to come out about their families to everyone around them, including friends, teachers, baby-sitters, Scout leaders and coaches...

Already in preschool and kindergarten, children with LGBT parents are put on the spot. For example, a kindergarten teacher thinks nothing of having the children draw pictures of their families and share them with their classmates. When I knew I would be holding up my drawing to the entire class, I drew my mom and dad, but not my dad’s partner. I was not ready to explain why my family picture had an extra man in it. For Derek, 33, this kind of class assignment was his first clue that his family was different. “I drew our family,” he remembers. “Dad, my two brothers, me, Mom, and Donna. The teacher asked who Donna was. I told her ‘Donna.’ I thought every family had a Donna.”...

There is a moment in every child’s life when she learns that there is hate and pain in the world. Children with LGBT parents also become aware that some of that hate is directed toward their family, which threatens their sense of safety. Even the child who had no problems relating the details about his family to every baby-sitter, cashier, and telemarketer, might suddenly become withdrawn and hesitant as he gets older.

Darius Greenbacher, 32, recalls the point when he began to care about what other people thought:

“My mom was always out and every school year she made sure that she told all my teachers that I came from a lesbian family. I had very few problems or issues around my upbringing until puberty set in. From about eleven until maybe thirteen, it really scared me to have lesbian parents. I felt that if people knew, they would think I was gay. Which now would have been fine, but at that time, there was so much pressure, so much homophobia, especially in those early years of puberty. And I was very, very scared and nervous about that...”

Even when the hostility turns physical, children do not always tell their parents. Children know that reporting such incidents can stir up a chorus of I-told-you-so’s from judgmental people who maintain that it is “unfair” to children to be raised by LGBT parents. Children who want to continue to be supportive and loyal to their parents often keep harassment to themselves so their parents will not feel guilty or responsible. Many adult children admit to hiding their encounters with homophobia for the sake of their parents....

When I ask a child of LGBT parents “How’s school?” we both know I’m not asking about academics. They tell me how kids treat them on the bus, which teachers have identified themselves as “safe staff,” and which classmates they try to avoid on the playground. Kids in middle school and high school typically give an hour-by-hour rundown on the supportive or homophobic climate in each class. They are constantly assessing situations for homophobia, and figuring out where they need to be on their guard the most.

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