

Guided Visualization

Read the following guided visualization as part of a consciousness-raising exercise, paying attention to the pacing of the reading.

Take a few minutes at the beginning of this guided visualization to relax and breathe deeply. *[3-second pause]* Are you ready? *[2-second pause]* Here we go . . . *[2-second pause]*

Regardless of your own sexual identity or orientation, today you are about to put yourself in someone else's shoes. Our scenario begins with your imagination.

Imagine that you are a heterosexual, non-gay female in a relationship with a man. (Sound OK so far?) The societal group that you belong to comprises only 10% of the Canadian adult population. The other 90% of people are gay. While Canadians are slowly realizing that straight people exist, most are still very opposed to people like you declaring yourselves publicly. *[3-second pause]*

Assume now that a major festive holiday is upon us. Christmas, Hanukkah, Ramadan, something of that magnitude. I, your lesbian supervisor at work, ask casually what you plan to do over the holidays. How do you, the non-gay, describe the potential events of the holidays without giving me any clues that your intimate partner is male? *[2-second pause]* Is it safe to reveal that to me? *[1-second pause]* If you don't think it is, how do you describe your traditions, roles, family makeup, parties, and activities without letting me know that you plan to do anything connected with heterosexual institutions or functions? Do you lie? *[2-second pause]* How do you feel about yourself? *[2-second pause]*

And now, in this switched-around world, I decide to give a January party for the office staff and invite all of you to bring your partners. Are you brave enough to bring the opposite-sex partner you have lived with secretly for the past 12 years? *[1-second pause]* If you don't, what do you tell him as you leave him at home and go out and pretend to be single? *[1-second pause]* How does he feel about that? *[1-second pause]* Suppose you decide to come to the party alone. By what signals do you recognize the other non-gays there? *[1-second pause]* Do you speak to other suspected non-gays or are you afraid that being friendly with them might make people suspect you? *[2-second pause]* What do you do when I turn down the lights, and put on slow dance music? Who do you dance with? Do you ask one of "them" *[with emphasis on the them]* to dance? Is that too dangerous? *[1-second pause]* What do you tell your partner when you get home that night? *[3-second pause]*

Let's go back to your home. Your home—the one safe place you share with your partner. Think about your décor and the obvious signs of your non-gay relationship. *[1-second pause]* If I stop by unexpectedly, do I see two fully-furnished bedrooms to disguise your relationship, or do you take the risk of having only one? *[1-second pause]* Think about the books, videos, CDs you have lying around. Do you subscribe to the local straight paper, or are you afraid to have it delivered to your home? What do the pictures and artwork on your walls tell me when I walk in? *[2-second pause]*

How do you access birth control—gays don't need it! If you suddenly become pregnant, how do you explain that to your parents, friends, co-workers, your doctor? *[2-second pause]* What if you want to become a foster parent and your government forbids straights from doing this? *[2-second pause]*

Now, imagine yourself going to the home of your parents—a gay male couple, well-respected in the community. You've never revealed your orientation to them. *[1-second pause]* One of your fathers starts talking about today's Oprah show. Guess what was on? Cured heterosexuals!!! *[with emphasis]* Your other father says it's wonderful how they can cure sick people these days. Oprah affirmed that there is hope for straights—they can be fixed and lead a healthy, normal gay life. How do you feel? *[2-second pause]* Your parents continue to say they think straights are perverted and if any of their kids turned out to be heterosexuals they'd just die. *[3-second pause]*

It's your anniversary. Where do you find a romantic card that reflects your reality? *[1-second pause]* You've decided to celebrate with a weekend getaway together. When you arrive at the hotel and the desk clerk assumes that you want two separate beds, what do you do? *[1-second pause]* Perhaps you suggest that it's O.K., you can sleep in one bed. What if the hotel clerk insists that they're happy to provide you with two. Then what? *[3-second pause]*

And now . . . Your partner becomes very ill and goes to the hospital—this partner that you have loved and lived with for 12 years. *[2-second pause]* You have no legal ties because there are none available to you. How do you get into intensive care to see him? *[1-second pause]* How do you deal with his family who hold the legal right to make decisions about his care? *[1-second pause]* How do you keep from exposing your love for him? *[2-second pause]* If he dies, how do you handle not having the right to claim his body and arrange the funeral? *[1-second pause]* How do you feel when his family makes it clear that you are not welcome at the gathering? *[1-second pause]* You need time off work. You need time to deal with this, and to heal. Our workplace has no bereavement leave for opposite-sex relationships. What do you say to me, your supervisor? *[4-second pause]*

Are you still breathing? *[1-second pause]* Take a few minutes to attend to your feelings and thoughts? *[10-second pause]* Feel your feet on the floor. *[1-second pause]* Come back into the room.