

## The Questions

Does your mother know? Does your father know? You don't mind somebody's sight? Why become gay? Where is your first kiss place?

How do you understand their mind? When you knew their mind first time, what did you think about that, and what did you say to them? Can you love them who have totally changed as same as before? Did you take many time to understand them?

When someone looked them how they feeling? Good or Bad? Why? (If feel bad.) How can they have a child? Do lesbians people don't want to sex with man? How thy lesbian people can get married and have a baby?

Can gay people get marry? Is legal to get marry for gay people? What's the good/bad things to be gay? How can they have children?

Lesbians can become like men? Lesbians has been liked only women since you born or was lesbians straight a long time ago? When did lesbians change lesbians?

Do you feel sometimes different/not a part of the community? Are you afraid that your homosexual friend could begin to love you? Are there many people on the street looking strange to you? Can you understand people who don't agree to the homosexuality? How did you feel when you first recognize that you are gay/lesbian?

When do you know you a gay? If your child grow up and your child can't understand and can't to receive what will you do? What way you find your partner?

What troubles have you ever been in? How do you overcome these troubles? What's the best thing?

If LGBT people love someone, how they approach him or her? And when will they confide to him or her who LGBT people that they are LGBT?

To transgender: when you were young, did you want to change your gender? Are you proud of yourself? Or sometimes, did you hate yourself because you were different from other people?

If I met someone who is gay, how should I do, for example, I'm a woman, so if I have a gay friend, I should think him as a woman?

I think many gay people have great talent. What do you think why? If I ask someone, are you gay or lesbian? Is it impolite? What is the most difficult problem about a transgender?

Why they need for protect? Do you believe one day a gay will be president of the US? How many gays living in SF? Where do they stay instead of Castro Street? What could be happens if I fight with them?

Does your friends know? Where do you like your partner?

What is the number one issue for gay rights groups?

In a couple of gays, who acts the father (boy)? Who act the mother (girl)?

Are you regret being a gay or lesbian? If possible, will you to be a normal sexual person?

Do they mind peculiar judgment?

Do you wanna get marriage with your partner?

When you knew that? Did you bullying by someone? Do you have a wife or husband? Do you want to a baby? Do you enjoying your life? Do you want to get married? What type boy and girl do you like? What do you think, what different normal people's life and gay and lesbian's life? Are your parents gay or lesbian? When you confessed about you, did your parents surprise?

What do you think about straight people? For you, we are strange and uncommon? Or you feel you are strange and uncommon? If there are all homosexual couple in the world, world will become good and comfortable? Or world doesn't work? What do you think?

Does the lesbian's Mr. cut the hair short? Does the lesbian's Mr. bind up her thorax? When they become a homosexual, does they become back normal native aptitude in the future? Does they want to do transsexual operation?

How do you find your partner? How many times have you ever broken heated with same sex people? Did you feel to be a gay? Do you want to have a your baby?

How did you feel when you realize that you son/daughter was homosexual/bisexual? Why is gay culture so popular in San Francisco? How do you feel about not being able to marry someone of the same sex? Can homosexual people adopt kids? Do you feel rejected by the heterosexual population?

If your friend or family become LGBT people do you accept them?

Does you have any problem? Does it happen to fall in love with your friend? If so, what does your friend feel? Is it comfortable to live in this country?

Does it bring any inconvenient to you and your life? How about your parents? Do they know?? How's their reaction? How do you find a life partner? Once you and your life partner walking on the street of having meals in restaurant, others people keep talking about your gays, how would you handle this kind of situation? What kinds of problems will you argue with which are different from others?

They Gay can adopt children? The transgender have problems to change they body? Or need accepted for governor? The homosexual people can live together?

Have you ever travelled to another country? If it is the case, how did you lived your homosexuality or transexuality over there? How did people look at you if they knew this? Is it a choice from you to decide to live next to SF or in SF because of the community there? Do you think a lot of people come here for this?

How do you feel about Californian law about homosexuality? Do you think the government helps you to live your homosexuality in a normal way?

I think some people are gays because of they born at a gay. But some people (especially young people) are just from curious; the culture things make them do something they shouldn't.

What did you feel when you recognized your children were gays or lesbians?

How do you know that you are gay? Why it is legal to adopt a child for gays and lesbians couples but it is not to get married?

How do you find your lover? How to proclamation to the person who you love?

## **From the Homosexual Activity Board**

I applied for a full-time position that would include organizing lectures at the corporate language school where I was a part-time teacher for two years. I wanted to do a queer themed diversity training for my trial lecture. Parents and Family for Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) called me back. The local chapter was very generous in working on making a lecture appropriate for our international student body. There are roughly 100 students, mostly 18-25 years old, from Belgium, Colombia, France, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Switzerland, Taiwan, and Venezuela. We had a staff meeting where I gave suggestions to the teachers on how to do activities that pre-taught queer vocabulary, history, and current political issues. I was the point person. *Which is more politically incorrect, the word gay or queer?* Every teacher also agreed to have their students write a few anonymous questions that we could give to PFLAG to use after their power point presentation.

My boss handed me the pile of questions written on torn or folded pieces of lined paper. He looked at me reluctantly as I started building a photocopied packet in the teacher's lounge. *You're totally going to make art of this, aren't you?* This boss was always making jokes. Was he just teasing me? This art comment irked me because I felt he was implying that I had some selfish sneaky exploitive motive with the lecture, like it was revenge instead of a necessary discomfort for the school to experience together.

I really wasn't planning on making anything out of the questions. I had brought the questions to a reading only intending to show poet friend collaborator Charity Coleman, who had listened to me churn through anxieties about the lecture. Then they got passed around and marveled at as pure poetry. I was feeling very contemplative about found text at the time. I mean, who wasn't? It was summer, 2009. I had just seen the conceptualist poet Vanessa Place give a reading at 21 Grand in Oakland, reading what would become her masterfully controversial *Statement of Facts*. After passive listening to transcripts used in a sex-offender case, this was the first time, maybe the only time in recent memory, I felt the people at a poetry reading pulsating afterwards, spilling their discomfort in the alley, asking for a drag of a cigarette even though they didn't smoke. At some point Place said, *I wrote this*, exterminating even the grounds for an argument on original poetry verses found text. A proclamation for our work environments not being separate from the language exposure projects of our open source world. She read in a de-contextualized cracking low voice, crawling out from her act of experiencing the transcripts unlike any reader would. Place made the poetry raw witness and burden, a performance onto ourselves as readers.

It took me about three months of staring at the photocopied questions on my desk before I could think clearly about *making* something from them. I tried answering the questions after a while but continued to hate the way the answers sounded. Staring was enough and not enough. I first thought the questions were a gay holiday bonus, an overtime package for all my hard work in homophobic and heterocentric schools in a time when people don't think that's such a big problem any more. Then I wanted to show the questions to people because they are fascinating repurposed confessions. I made people read them if they came to my house. I emailed them to friends who couldn't come to my house. I sent them to Michelle Tea's poetry chapbook contest and they got rejected.

Meanwhile I felt like I was holding these questions hostage. I must address a possible layer of judgment a reader will have. A knee-jerk reaction is to marvel at these questions because some, if not many, are grammatically unusual (incorrect as the grammar book would say) to a native English speaker's ear. The word choice sounds like instant poetry, or easy comedy. To me it's just subject verb agreement, or singular plural mistakes. It would be a trap for the native English speaker to make a power move over these questions because of the voice. I respect these questions. I cannot forget they are cut and pasted from many different places of cultural indoctrination. They are trying to travel.

Some analysis: I noticed the majority of the questions are about babies, marriage, and how to keep or not keep your sexuality a secret because it is a bad or temporary thing. Some emotion: A majority of these questions made me feel grateful for not feeling like shit for who I am. But I didn't always feel so carefree about being a dyke and those memories started to haunt me.

And so began the mental tracking of being queer and being a teacher in various different classrooms for the past seven years of my life. After uncomfortable laughter, I used to silence the topic of queerness because I would feel ill, hot, angry and unable to stand up. It was like a huge false alarm sneeze that I stepped out of the room to take and no one said anything about it because no one heard it or felt any spit sprayed onto their notebooks. About two years ago I had enough. I started by telling my then boss he needed to talk to students who ridicule other students by calling them gay.

Now I have taught myself to combat the homophobia by pushing ridiculers to say why they think gay people are funny. They stop the ridiculing just like they stop cursing when I ask them to repeat what they said. Oh nothing. Cursing is a language student's favorite sport. One time a fellow classmate stopped my interrogation of a student saying *gay men are not real men* by yelling, *hello, we are in the Bay Area!* So, sometimes I am not totally alone.

Sex is not a classroom topic like transportation is, but it does come up. The school I taught at is on the campus of an all-women's four-year college. This means all the homophobia at the school is exasperated by sightings of queer couples and gender queer people. It also means people in my life were so surprised about the bullshit I had to deal with because they thought the all-women's campus was an indestructibly warm, loving and perfect place for the queers.

The language school's director, aka my boss' boss, who I never saw except when he took the teachers out for drinks twice a year, asked me what I thought about the school in the interview for the full-time position that I didn't get. My answer: I don't feel safe or supported at your school as a queer person. But I can survive--I only spend about 25 hours a week here. I go home to my supportive friends and family and gay bars and lefty world. I asked about queer students who may have chosen this San Francisco Bay Area school under the illusion that it would be a place for them to come out or be out. I told my boss' boss the school needs drastic improvements like a gay straight alliance and a queer activity board.

He was surprised about all my feedback. He said, I don't see a problem with you being out as long as you don't talk about sex. He said there was once a lesbian employee (did I know them? No) who worked in the office that brought their girlfriend to a staff party once and he was OK with that. He said he would not approve of a homosexual activity board because they don't have a heterosexual activity board. He

stuttered, pretty heavily, over the order and lettering in the acronym LGBT. He said students would complain if they put a homosexual activity board up because it would offend their culture. He said the customer is always right and the customer isn't homosexual.

I told my boss's boss how my coworker gave a slide lecture to the school about meeting his wife's family. I told him how this made me upset because I knew I could never give a lecture about my life without it being either half silenced or controversial. Whereas a fairytale framed story of a middle class white guy marrying a poor Chinese village girl was A-OK. I imagined no one ever told the white guy he couldn't talk about his sex life to his students. But he did show pictures of his newborn baby.

The loophole in discussing gay issues in my classroom has been to address prejudice, culture and current events--essentially desexualizing it. My personal life may seem easily extractable from the classroom--no talking about fucking with a dildo today, remember, I chant to myself as I enter the classroom. But being queer does come up for me every single time a student makes a pronoun mistake or a word or situation has romantic connotations. I take note of this and it happens at least once in a full teaching day. If it's Valentine's Day or the topic in the textbook is love or dating, I am reminded I must delicately bring up queerness multiple times. I deliver pronouns with pause and give examples of women in men's roles or men in women's roles. I avoid talking about marriage. Language classrooms, I think, are the battleground of being queer or fearing queer.

While passing through the hallways or making small talk with students, I would get hit with the ultimate personal question: *Do you have a boyfriend?* I used to just say no, no boyfriend and before I could say anything else I would start to feel like I was going to vomit. I rationalized being closeted as a way to save energy. That theory didn't last. Once I started looking and acting more butch, students have stopped asking me the boyfriend question. Now I throw my queer vomit on them if personal questions come up. I tell them. And nothing happens.

One night at a lesbian bar, I ran into a former student who had changed to a different language school. We then did a Spanish English conversation trade and became friends. All we talked about was how no one knew who we *really* were. Or one or two people knew. We soon realized we didn't have much in common after we tired of that conversation. I once had two female students from Japan and Taiwan who had fallen in love in my class. They waited until I wasn't their teacher for half a year to tell me they were a couple. I had waited until I wasn't their teacher to come out to them. After one year of teaching at a free English school for immigrants, I told my coworkers I had a girlfriend. I told them when I was saying goodbye at the graduation dinner. One of them said, oh, my cousin is gay. Another one, who I suspected all along to be gay, remained silent.

I came out to most of my friends and family during a job that was a fusion of teaching without New York state certification and research for a performance art piece where I was wandering the city as a religious Jewish runaway on the eve of her marriage. I was 22. I taught standardized test essay writing at a Lubavitch Yeshiva in Crown Heights Brooklyn. All my photocopies had to be initialed by the vice principal. I worried people would find me out because of my awkward motions at kissing the mezuzah when I walked in the room. For my interview, I taught how to read Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" to a room of deteriorating walls and the principal pretending to be a student asking to go to the bathroom in the middle of my explanation of a simile. I was hired. Then came the verbal contract to silence two key issues: gay people and birth control. In the event these topics arise in your classroom, deny their existence. I said yes like I said yes to my costume.

I was in full drag, meaning thick tights, a polyester below-the-knee skirt and a baggy collared shirt buttoned to suffocate. A student once scrawled *I hate gay people* on the board in the midst of an experimental poetry exercise I learned from Rob Fitterman. I got the class' attention and said *this is not okay* then erased the four words, careful not to trim the chalk marks of the words crowding *the hate*.

My friends joked with me that I had crushes on all my students. That made me angry. At the end of the

year, I went to a school dance on a cruise ship, which was the sweatiest underground lesbian dance party I have ever witnessed. It was raining that night on the Hudson River so all the girls had to crowd inside the dinky boat. I photographed while the windows fogged. I still have nothing to do with the pictures. They just are.

I started my school year at the Yeshiva with long hair and agonized over chopping it off, knowing this was not code for femininity in their culture. I was Miss Goldberg. *Where are you from*, everyone would ask. I said New Jersey. *Come to my Shabbat dinner*, teachers and staff said. This was a matchmaking proposition. I never went. I wore my teaching clothes to read poetry in between burlesque acts at nightclubs and performance spaces. When I threatened to quit because my paychecks were far from timely, the principal told me a story about students fundraising for their recently converted teacher's marriage equipment: a wig. Let's call the wig the great de-sexualizer: you're one man's baby maker now. I bargained. I don't want to teach essay writing anymore. I want to teach photography. And then I was lugging a slide projector plus screen with borrowed slides from the artist Erika deVries who I was assisting. I showed the blooming Jewish schoolgirls Lady Clementina Hawarden and Weegee. We went on walks to look at light. They made self-portraits.

I imagine that these questions the language school students wrote as positioning a correspondence or a chain letter to answer. They are questions one classroom asks another classroom. And in a time space where the classroom is not a confined room people are required to be in. I am writing to all the students' journals from the month of June that wrote about the gay pride parade as a time to see strange and naked people and take pictures of them. I'm writing to the academic articles I find on queer teaching that seem to be exclusively about professors at liberal arts colleges coming out to their students. I'm writing to all queer art that I complain about for being drenched in this-is-my-story. I want more people to answers these questions.

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