

Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Discrimination in the Workplace

A Practical Guide

Chapter 9: Living an Ordinary Life

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CHAPTER 9

LIVING AN ORDINARY LIFE

Cheryl McCormick, Esq.

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Editor’s Note: Most employees prefer that private facts about their lives remain private, particularly when it comes to their medical information. They normally do not want their gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation to be a subject of discussion or rumors at work. They simply want to do a good job and be respected by their peers.

Some gender-affirmed employees change jobs after coming out and try to “start over” in a new workplace, in a distant community, without most of their new coworkers knowing about their gender affirmation. This is referred to by some as “going stealth.” Some managers likely will need to know about the employee’s past; reference checks and prior achievements may tie the new employee to the past. Or the employee may still be in the midst of the gender-affirmation process and some government agencies may not yet recognize the change in name or gender and, thus, human resource personnel and some managers may need to be alerted so that one name and/or gender will be used for payroll purposes and the affirmed name and/or gender will be used for all other purposes.^a But that does not mean that these company officials are free to inform other employees if such is not the wish of the individual being hired.

In this essay, Cheryl McCormick, an accomplished lawyer, explains why she eschews disseminating her gender-affirmed status to new colleagues and in everyday life. As you likely

^aSee Chapter 33 (Issues Regarding Employees Coming Out Prior to Starting a New Job) for a discussion of how to handle name changes in situations such as this.

have figured out, we are using a pseudonym so that Cheryl can retain her privacy. Whether to be “out” is a highly personal choice that employers and others should respect. The choice allows individuals to best live their lives in a manner that is authentic to them.^b

Choosing not to disclose that you had different physical anatomy in the past is no different from not disclosing that you had a heart transplant (or colon cancer, a major facelift, etc.), that one of your children was killed on a safari, or that one of your parents won a coveted international award (or is in prison for operating a Ponzi scheme). Without hesitation, we would agree that the heart surgery, the death, and the award need not be disclosed. Why, then, should corrective gender-related surgery be treated any differently?^c

^bSee Wayne Maines, “*Going Stealth*”: *A Complicated and Dynamic Family Decision*, HUFFINGTON POST (Aug. 6, 2012), www.huffingtonpost.com/wayne-maines/transgender-children_b_1740140.html. To learn more about the Maines family, see the Editor’s Note at the beginning of Chapter 12 (A Parent’s Perspective on Gender Affirmations). To learn more about the litigation that the Maines family instituted against the Orono, Maine, school system, see *Doe v. Clenchy*, GAY & LESBIAN ADVOCATES & DEFENDERS (Jan. 30, 2014), www.glad.org/work/cases/doe-v.-clenchy. In January 2014, the Maine Supreme Judicial Court decided the *Clenchy* case, issuing the first decision by a state’s highest court expressly upholding the right of gender-affirmed individuals to use the public restrooms that correspond to their gender identity. *Doe v. Regional Sch. Unit 26*, 86 A.3d 600 (Me. 2014), *rev’g sub nom. Doe v. Clenchy*, No. CV-09-201 (Me. Super. Ct. Nov. 20, 2012). The litigation is also discussed in the Maine law summary in Chapter 20 (Survey of State Laws Regarding Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Discrimination in the Workplace) and in Chapter 36 (Gender-Segregated Facilities).

^cIn early 2014, a heated discussion took place in the blogosphere with respect to an article—Caleb Hannan, *Dr. V’s Magical Putter: The Remarkable Story Behind a Mysterious Inventor Who Built a “Scientifically Superior” Golf Club*, GRANTLAND (Jan. 15, 2014), <http://grantland.com/features/a-mysterious-physicist-golf-club-dr-v>—that the ESPN-affiliated website *Grantland* published that “outed” the inventor as a transgender person. The inventor committed suicide, with some speculating that she feared being outed by the forthcoming article or because the author had outed her to one of her investors during the author’s investigation of her background. A few days after the article was released, *Grantland* editor-in-chief Bill Simmons wrote a lengthy apology, explaining:

To my infinite regret, we never asked anyone knowledgeable enough about transgender issues to help us either (a) improve the piece, or (b) realize that we shouldn’t run it. That’s our mistake—and really, my mistake, since it’s my site. So I want to apologize. I failed.

More importantly, I realized over the weekend that I didn’t know nearly enough about the transgender community—and neither does my staff. I read Caleb’s piece a certain way because of my own experiences in life. That’s not an acceptable excuse; it’s just what happened. And it’s what happened to Caleb, and everyone on my staff, and everyone who read/praised/shared that piece during that 56-hour stretch [following publication].

Bill Simmons, *The Dr. V Story: A Letter From the Editor: How “Dr. V’s Magical Putter” Came to be Published*, GRANTLAND (Jan. 20, 2014), <http://grantland.com/features/the-dr-v-story-a-letter-from-the-editor>. Among those who chimed in on the article are Christina Kahrl, an openly transgender sportswriter for ESPN.com, and Robert Lipsyte, ESPN’s Ombudsman. See Christina Kahrl, *What Grantland Got Wrong: Understanding the Serious Errors in “Dr. V’s Magical Putter,”* GRANTLAND (Jan. 20, 2014), <http://grantland.com/features/what-grantland-got-wrong>; Robert Lipsyte, *Dr. V Story Understandable, Inexcusable*, ESPN.COM (Jan. 27, 2014), http://espn.go.com/blog/ombudsman/post/_id/305/dr-v-story-understandable-inexcusable.

I'll start with the basics: As you probably know by now, "Cheryl McCormick" isn't my name. I'm one of two essayists in this treatise who are using pseudonyms, for reasons I'll discuss shortly. In fact, those reasons are very much the point of this essay.

I. THE YS AND Y NOTS OF LIFE

You already know some of why my basic life story is "different," so I won't belabor too many details. I'm a woman in my 50s, and I was born with a Y chromosome to pair with an X. I didn't ask for the Y, and as life evolved, it became exceptionally clear I didn't want anything to do with it. Through decades of internal struggle and strife, I would constantly ask myself, "Y?" After living for so long with the misery of not having any idea who I was, or knowing it instinctively but not believing I could do anything about it, I finally embarked on a course of agonizingly painful electrolysis—which nobody in their right mind would undertake without an extraordinary reason. Still, for the first two of those years, I didn't do anything more than get electric needles stuck in my face for four hours a week, while still wondering, "Y?"

Until one day, in the depths of life despair, I realized that the only possible answer would have to be, "Y not?"

At which point I began a 15-month process of affirmation, during which I basically went underground until I felt able to come out to my professional colleagues, birth family, and closest friends. At the end of that process, I underwent medical procedures that eliminated the painful physical manifestations of the unwanted Y, a process that was as joyously positive for me as it was profound. Immediately afterward, I began a wonderful job with new colleagues; stayed for several years; met the love of my life; and eventually moved with her to a state where our lifelong commitment was afforded the same status as different-sex couples and where we wouldn't face hostility as a same-sex couple.

I couldn't be happier. And I don't think anyone here knows about that question from my genetics and prior life, "Y?" I just live a normal life with serenity and quiet confidence, as an individual, and as part of a locally well-known same-sex couple. I don't need to tell people I'm gender affirmed.

A brief aside: In this essay, I'll be using the phrase "gender affirmed" rather than "transgender" or "transsexual," words I don't use to describe myself and that are often used to demean people. Although I don't consider "transgender" to be an accurate descriptor of who I am, others find it an accurate reflection of themselves, and that's fine. In real life, words definitely do matter.¹ As the *Fenway Health Glossary*² notes, if you must use labels, mirror the terms used by the person being labeled.

¹See the discussion of language and terminology in Chapter 2 (The Transformative Power of Words).

²See the *Fenway Health Glossary of Gender and Transgender Terms*, which sets forth an array of nonpejorative terms that people use, and appropriately notes that "some people find the

II. PERSONAL PRIVACY

Although I consider my choice of not revealing my life history to be one of personal privacy, I know that some people would call it “stealth.” For me, “stealth” sounds distasteful, like some international spy ring or the Stealth Bomber. Perhaps even worse, “stealth” makes it seem like I’m trying to pretend I’m someone I’m not, when quite the opposite is true—I want people to see me exactly as I am, without their thinking of or imagining someone I certainly am not.

I consider myself very fortunate to be in this position in life. Physically, I don’t stand out much; I’m taller than most women, but plenty are taller, and anyway it seems that height can be a fine attribute for a woman who carries it well. (As I write this, a wonderful young woman who’s much taller than I am won a gold medal in swimming at the 2012 London Olympics, and I can’t imagine anyone ever questions her gender.) I worked on my voice years ago so that now it just comes across as an everyday part of the package, and I’m perceived as a fairly attractive woman who looks younger than her age. I’m not sure anyone in my community—other than supportive medical providers—has any idea of where I came from in life, or would have enough savvy about such issues to wonder. Not that it’s anything I’d lose sleep over.

And I admit—I like it that way.

It’s probably societal nature to give undue attention to people who are clearly different. Which, unfortunately, often means that a person ends up being defined in the perceptions of others by his or her difference. Ask an African American who has lived, worked, or gone to school in a sea of white faces. I’d expect that they’d be able to delineate this phenomenon—and their disappointment at it—better than I can. Ask Caster Semenya, a world-class runner who competed in the London Olympics, about whom nearly every news article directly or indirectly noted—usually within the first two paragraphs of her mention—that she had, or was suspected of having, a difference in sex development.³

In more unpleasant scenarios, the focus on differences can lead to prejudice, malicious gossip, a lot of intrusive and overly personal questions, or people shying away for reasons they might not even be particularly aware of. In worst-case scenarios, it can lead to discrimination, bullying, and even violence. I don’t fear the latter two, but I certainly experienced employment discrimination when I “outed” myself during one interview, and a lot of

word ‘transgender’ ... a faulty descriptor of themselves.” FENWAY HEALTH, GLOSSARY OF GENDER AND TRANSGENDER TERMS 2 (rev. Jan. 2010), available at http://www.fenwayhealth.org/site/DocServer/Handout_7-C_Glossary_of_Gender_and_Transgender_Terms__fi.pdf?docID=7081.

³For example, here is what *The New York Times* had to say about Ms. Semenya on the day she won a silver medal:

In the women’s 800 meters, Mariya Savinova of Russia won in 1:56.19, and Caster Semenya of South Africa closed furiously to take the silver in 1:57.23. Semenya was last midway through the race and seemed to wait too late to make her charge.

Her start appeared to be a tactical mistake, but the finish seemed to confirm the great resolve of an athlete who had been subjected to sex-verification tests in 2009 and

people have it far worse than I ever did.⁴ Even in best-case scenarios, it can become more difficult for people to look at someone who's known to be different, without feeling—whether or not consciously, and likely not in a good way—“They're different.” It can change the interpersonal dynamics, too, as I know from first-hand experience: In a couple of small subcommunities where people knew my background, no matter how much I made clear that I didn't want to be defined by my “differences” or be referred to as “trans-” this or “trans-” that, some people couldn't seem to help themselves. Many of them meant well, but that plus \$2.50 would buy a MetroCard on a New York subway in 2012.

From a societal standpoint, gender-affirmed people are *very* different. The fact that someone can go through a gender affirmation is unnerving to many, perhaps in large part because it challenges their preconceived notions of both sex being defined solely by one's genitalia and acceptable gender roles. And plenty of people can't seem to avoid fixating on differences they'll never see. For example, every time I heard Larry King interview a gender-affirmed woman, he came across to me as wanting to be sympathetic but unable to restrain himself from asking about her genitalia. I admired the grace of those women, in no small part because I'd have had no desire to field such questions myself.

The more “different” one is from a societal norm, the more difficult it can be to just live a relatively normal life like most everyone else. That's not to say it can't be done, but because I want to live that relatively normal life, of course I prefer less difficult to more. And I am so fortunate to have that opportunity. Not every gender-affirmed woman does; the medical, social, family, and financial barriers can be daunting. But because my own road to serenity is a little easier, I'm not about to change that by “outing” myself at this time. I know so well that one never says “never,” but at least for now, I have no particular desire to disrupt the joy in living that I worked so hard to find, seemingly against all odds.

And why should I want to? The word “stealth” sounds so ominous. I don't feel it applies to me, for again, words matter. Why can't I just be part of the flow of life? The answer is that I can. And I am.

withering personal scrutiny as track officials clumsily handled the matter of whether she should be allowed to compete as a woman.

“I feel very proud,” Semenya, 21, said.

Jeré Longman, *Farah Wins 5,000 to Give Home Team Another Title*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 11, 2012), available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/12/sports/olympics/mo-farah-wins-5000-meters-at-london-olympics.html>.

A “difference in sex development” is a less stigmatizing way of describing someone who would otherwise be referred to as having an intersex condition. [*Editor's Note:* Ms. Semenya's situation is discussed further in Professor Julie Greenberg's essay in Chapter 46 (Interacting in the Workplace With Individuals Who Have an Intersex Condition), as well as in Chapter 16 (The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973), Section III.E.3.]

⁴[*Editor's Note:* For an additional discussion of the adversity that LGBT employees may experience in the workplace, see Brad Sears and Christy Mallory's essay in Chapter 40 (Employment Discrimination Against LGBT People: Existence and Impact).]

After all, other people aren't required to broadcast the most personal and private details of their medical and social histories. Do people usually "out" themselves for having had a hysterectomy or prostate cancer and entertain a long series of questions on the subject by anyone who cares to ask (not always very gracefully)? Do we expect people to introduce themselves by saying something like, "My father is in prison and my cousin has schizoaffective disorder," and then be ready to provide details after every introduction? Not that I'd compare myself to any of those situations, but I trust you get the idea: In most circumstances, what's personal and private is usually allowed to remain personal and private. Sometimes, in fact, we even look askance at people who seem overly eager to reveal personal details. There's even a term for it—"oversharing"—and an acronym—"TMI."

So why should my situation be so different? Why should declining to display one's life story to the world be given a pejorative-sounding label like "stealth," if what's not being revealed isn't anyone else's business in the first place? People who know me know that I'm a woman, a talented professional, part of a same-sex couple, a very nice person, and a valued member of my local community whose life has friendship and love. I'm more than happy to leave it at that.

Now obviously, for me to live a normal life, some people have to know where I came from. My immediate family knows, as do most of my relatives. Some trusted friends know, more likely if they met me before or not long after my life affirmation. Many gender-affirmed people might intuitively know, but I don't think I've yet seen any around here. And there are always those few people with especially acute social radar who can just tell. My life partner knows everything, of course, yet she sees and hears only a loving woman—in fact, she's sometimes said I'm the most normal woman she's ever known. My privacy has been respected and well guarded by those close to me who've been called on to do so, for which I'm very grateful. To the extent word got out to a few people in ways I might not have wanted, I just dealt with it, and then went on living life.

I suppose some might call that "stealth." I don't call it anything at all, because, like most people, I don't go around giving names to aspects of everyday personal life. What is it called if someone doesn't tell the world she's ambidextrous?

But if we have to give it a name, let's call it something like: "Respecting a Great Gal and My Own Personal Privacy." The acronym would then be R-A-G-G-M-O-P-P. That's especially easy for those who either know a lot of blues or remember a mopy cover version by the Muppets.

I recognize that as a RAGGMOPP, I'm probably in the minority among gender-affirmed people. (There are more of us than you might think, but we generally just don't hear of or from them.) And I don't diminish the choices other people make to be fully revealing about their status as gender-affirmed (or, if they prefer, "trans") women and men. Everyone is unique; everyone is powerfully drawn toward living the life that is truest to who he or she is—something most readers of this essay just take for granted but a fact

that is an extreme driving force in the life of virtually every LGBT person. Most gender-affirmed people would say they embarked on their perilous journey, often quite literally one of life or death, to try to live a life that most reflects who they genuinely are. I would never choose to tell others what is the truest way for them to live their lives, and I shouldn't pay heed if anyone sought to tell me what's truest for mine.

Anyway, I'm already "out" about having a minority status, because I think most everyone around here knows my partner and I are a same-sex couple. And that part has worked just fine.

You may be asking yourself, "Isn't there a contradiction here, Cheryl wanting to keep her gender affirmation private but not her sexual orientation?" No, there isn't. Being part of a couple is an integral part of my life, and I can't imagine trying to hide the person with whom I'm coupled; or, before I met my life partner, with whom I'd hoped to be coupled. By contrast, my status as a gender-affirmed woman doesn't affect anything in my everyday life, so there's no reason to "out" myself in that respect. My relational orientation is my present and my future; having gone through a gender affirmation relates mostly to my past; and to me, they're apples and oranges.

That's as different as I care to be in everyday life. It might also be about as much difference as most people can handle for now, judging from the reactions I used to get when I tried to explain being a gender-affirmed lesbian. Talk about being perceived as different!

I'm not an activist by nature. I just wanted to find a way to go on living after decades of feeling profoundly disconnected from my own identity, and then from there, to finally live a life of joy, serenity, accomplishment, and authenticity. I couldn't have imagined what I'd find when I started the journey, but several years later, I have a life that's as wonderful as it is normal. I'm delighted to keep it that way.

III. DEALING WITH BREACH OF PERSONAL PRIVACY

Do I worry that someone will ever "out" my life history? Not really.

Professionally, the novelty has long since worn off. For a while, my life change might have been seen by some as noteworthy, largely because I was the first attorney in my state and practice area who was known to have "crossed the gender barrier." And although there was a little rejection, most people's reactions were quite positive (at least that I knew of), and it helped foster some new friendships that continue to this day. But in short order, I came to feel it wasn't worth making a big deal over, and others didn't seem very concerned, either. By now (with few exceptions) I haven't got a clue which colleagues know and which don't. It doesn't really matter, and I don't bother to ask.

As for people in my community finding out, I suppose it may happen someday, but I'm not going to change who I am or how I live. What good would that do? Life is too short to be living in fear of something that might never happen, and that would just be another part of life if it does.

If I ever get asked, my response—whatever it may be—will be accompanied by a smile. I've long since learned that if I come across as kind, capable, and quietly strong and confident with myself and toward others, that's what people will pick up on. I think that's true of anyone, in any walk of life.

But I'm still not going to invite being "outed" or do it to myself. Just because I feel I can handle it if it happens someday doesn't necessarily mean I want to ask for it.

On a professional level, my own workplace experience was an example of how things can go well as a RAGGMOPP—for the very reason that my colleagues met me not as "Cheryl-the-Trans-Woman" but rather as just Cheryl, the new lawyer they were happy to have on the team. It made for a very smooth integration into the workplace, and by the time people learned something of my background, it had no effect on their already-formed feelings about me.

The supervisors at my new place of employment of course all knew my life history from the start. I couldn't have been hired without it—the organization was looking for someone with lots of experience. My former name was all over the matters I'd worked on over the years, and I had to refer the hiring committee to those matters in order to demonstrate that I had the experience they wanted. Almost everyone in the office had known the professional reputation that was coupled with my former name, but the supervisors didn't tell people about my former name, or that I even had one. So when I was hired, the rest of my colleagues knew only that some woman they'd never heard of, named Cheryl McCormick, was now on board. That meant I had to establish my personal and professional reputation in the office from square one, but the facts that I was hired in the first place, that the staff trusted those doing the hiring to make sound decisions in bringing new people on, and that the managers modeled that confidence in working with me in front of staff was a solid starting point for establishing respect and personal relationships, and everything worked out just fine.

About six weeks after I came on board, one of the clerical staff—who pays a lot of attention to people, and who also has a young niece who was born with a difference in sex development—figured it out. Word spread fast after that, of course. But by then, people saw me not as "Cheryl-the-Trans-Woman," but as just Cheryl, a knowledgeable attorney and a very nice person who happened to be gender-affirmed. I fielded few questions I didn't want to, most people didn't seem concerned, and everyone's lives just went on. And because I'd already gained widespread acceptance over those six weeks, there wasn't much to talk about—except office work, everyday interpersonal matters, and whatever else office colleagues typically discuss. Exactly as I'd hoped.

Thus, most people there didn't see me as different, because their initial perceptions were ones of sameness rather than difference. Instead, they just saw me as me. It got better over the years, as I like to think I exuded warmth, quiet confidence, and professional ability that had nothing to do with being gender-affirmed and everything to do with just being me. I quickly stopped

worrying about how every last person was going to perceive me; few people are capable of endearing themselves to everyone in an organization, so I just set about doing my professional and personal best. And it worked, the same way it would work for any new professional in an organization: Over time, I made friends, did good work, earned respect, and bonded with colleagues and staff in ways that have continued to this day. For most of the people in my office, if they saw a gender, they saw a woman—a strong, kind, and very capable woman, no less.

I couldn't have asked for more.

IV. PRACTICAL ADVICE

So as this piece winds to a close, you might ask yourself: “Does she have any practical words of wisdom if I hire a new employee who’s in the gender-affirmation process, or if one of my current employees begins the process on the job?”

These are my practical thoughts:

- Make certain your employee knows that if she or he is intentionally mistreated, the employee has someone to go to to discuss the issue confidentially, with a strong sense of support and without fear.
- If there is any possibility of a potential problem, a short memo can remind everyone in no uncertain terms of your organization’s unwavering and strongly enforced policy that *no* employee will be subjected to hostile, demeaning, or abusive treatment. Nobody’s name needs to be mentioned. It is usually worth avoiding policies or practices that make an employee feel singled out, to the extent that can be done. “Singled out” equates to “different” in the way I have characterized it above, and an employee in that position may already be highly sensitive to being different.
- If employees “come out” as gender affirmed, it won’t harm anyone if they use the restrooms that match their gender identity, because they will use a private stall. Conversely, it could be profoundly hurtful—and detrimental to those employees’ well-being, productivity, and future with the organization—to be singled out regarding restrooms, in such a personal way. Newly gender-affirmed people are simply trying to resolve a lifelong inner conflict at the deepest personal levels that most people couldn’t even begin to imagine, and people at any stage of gender affirmation deserve dignity and respect just like everyone else. No special rules or policies are needed, and nondiscrimination is the best policy of all.
- Respect for the individual is everything, and every individual is different. So make sure you know how each person wishes to be addressed, and then lead by example. Coming out of the “closet” after years of self-exile and in the face of a society that’s not all that accepting is often very daunting; it’s a time of life that’s full

of exploration, self-discovery, and evolution in a person's view of the world, but it also can be a time of life that is full of self-doubt and self-consciousness based on the reactions of others. The latter emotions are often just temporary, but in that interim time, a clear sense that strong respect is being proffered is particularly crucial and affirming.

- Those who experience a gender affirmation and thrive after it have so much to offer. What an incredible window on human behavior, to be able to understand the ways—both obvious and subtle—that each gender communicates, thinks, and acts *firsthand*. From my perspective years ago, to succeed in a gender affirmation at my age—against all odds, with no one to guide me but myself—I had to be a conscious student of human behavior, then fully internalize what I'd learned, to live everyday life without having to think about everything I did. So much became second nature that would have been incomprehensible before, and I saw how it dramatically expanded and shaped my perceptions of most everything. What an amazing asset that kind of understanding would be to so many executives and managers!
- Conversely, an employee in that position will feel an even greater sense of loyalty to you and the organization you represent for the opportunity to prove himself or herself. And if you want someone who'll go the extra mile, there's much to be said for relying on someone who's accustomed to running marathons.

I'd like to provide one specific anecdote to help sensitize you to the desire all of us RAGGMOPPS out there have to "just live a normal life." When I left my position several years after my gender affirmation, to seek the life I have now, I had an unfortunate reminder of why I prefer to be a RAGGMOPP. One supervisor—the one who encouraged me to apply for the job in the first place and someone with whom I'd worked very closely on a long-term project—candidly admitted that although he'd have hugged other women in the office if it were their last day, he didn't feel able to hug me because—well, he talked around it a bit, but the gist was obvious: He didn't perceive me as a "real woman." (Why that should have mattered for a simple farewell hug is a different question, not worth exploring here.) He asked if it was okay if we shook hands, which seemed so odd and unpleasant after our years of close professional association. In that moment, I chose to finesse the situation and give him what he requested. I wasn't expecting what happened, and I wasn't about to tell him to look at his own prejudices.

But there it is: I'm different. If someone knows, even someone as kind and (in other ways) open-minded and welcoming as this supervisor, then I may be treated as different in ways I don't want. Even if the incident discussed above was rooted in the supervisor's hidden prejudices rather than any shortcoming of mine, it felt rather disaffirming—"Is that what he thought of me all these years?" Being the target of prejudice even in the

smallest of things—and in many ways those small things are what being human is all about—can be hurtful, and it isn't necessarily less so if the person who harbors the prejudice “means well,” especially if it involves someone you trust.

On the other hand, when I went back to the office to revisit my former colleagues a little while ago, I was greeted with warmth and joy. Several people came to a happy hour in my honor afterward, a few others went out of their way to find (and hug) me while I was there, and I spent still more time with two of my closest friends in the organization. Although, in the aggregate, women who learned of my life change tended to be significantly more open to it than men, one of the people who came to happy hour was a middle-aged male attorney who, when the evening ended, gave me as warm an embrace as anyone. I'd once assumed he would be among the more reluctant to accept me on a personal level, for either religious or societal reasons. I was obviously quite wrong, and delighted to be so.

V. AN ORDINARY LIFE

Finally, although I would be pleased to be the first RAGGMOPP to whom you've been introduced, there's a good chance I'm not. There are many more of us out there, and you and I have likely worked with one or more and don't even know it. It's reassuring to know there are such unassuming role models who have succeeded in their professions and in everyday living, without sacrificing their privacy.

From my perspective, this isn't “stealth,” or anything else—it's just everyday life. And if I needed a label for it, then I'd prefer to pick the one that best reflects the reality of overcoming such extraordinary life challenges and odds, to reach the place where I am today:

Grateful.