

## What We See in Pictures

I'm swiping through Bumble when my daughter peers over my shoulder to look at my phone. The phone that holds a picture of a smiling woman.

I momentarily freeze and a rush of instinctual panic fills my body. I feel bare, discovered.

*I want to put my phone facedown.*

*I've been caught.*

*I don't know what to do.*

Committing to a choice, I deliberately stay on Bumble just a little bit longer, knowing she is watching, and soon she turns away, wordlessly.

How can such a small moment, an incident taking mere seconds, feel so significant? But as far as I know, there's no parenting book on how to come out to your own daughter.

She's been raised in the progressive way. We have #alltherightbooks, the ones that feature the various types of families: families that include grandparents under the same roof, the ones headed by single mother, and yes, the same-sex couple with kids. She knows that she can marry anyone she likes and first declared at four that she would someday marry a girl, a car conversation home from preschool that made me smile.

Yet somehow, I've gone nine years without openly addressing how I, her mother, am bisexual.

I say "somehow," as if it's a fact easy to throw around, as if it's something that I could have brought up casually in between talks about the importance of kindness and the tastiness of McDonald's fries.

Sure, I've been "quietly out" for some time in various circles, but this, this is different.

I wonder what she thinks. How is she reconciling this with my marriage to her father and the long-term boyfriend I had in the years after? Does this new information change the light in which she sees me?

I consider whether I crossed a line, if it was inappropriate to continue swiping in front of her, but she *had* snuck up on me; at the same time, I was just so damn aware that I did not want to model shame. And kids know that dating apps exist, right? But also, this is so much more than that.

She never brings up what she saw, and I don't either.

Instead, on a conspicuous day in February months later, she brings me a picture she's made. Drawn on pink construction paper, it features a view of the backs of two people and a rainbow spanning the top third. It says, "Happy Valentine's Day."

The two people are drawn, unmistakably, to be women. One with medium-long hair and the other with long-long hair.

I am careful to ask her, "Is this you and me?"

No, she says. She watches me, waiting.

*Are they together or are they friends?*

I don't know how to be direct.

*They aren't.*

And when I don't reply right away, she quickly says "But they could be." As if she is scared she mis-stepped. (We are dancing around this, and I don't know how to lead.)

*It's okay if they aren't. If they're more than friends.*

It's been five years now, and I don't remember if she said anything back. What I do remember, most, is her caution and wonder, mixed with a sweet reassurance in a picture specially drawn for a child's mother.