

Sissyboy

It's time to reclaim that sweet, queeny little boy that society killed

There is a scene in the very brilliant movie *The Opposite of Sex*, when the narration flashes back to the childhood of one of the characters. It looks like we're watching old home movies and Tom is about 6 years old. He's playing dress-up with his sisters. They have adorned him in a fun little number—beaded flapper dress, costume jewelry, wig and makeup. The dad happens upon this trio and turns his wrath on little Tom, grabbing him by the arms and spanking him wildly.

OUTWORD
BY DEAN SIDWELL

His spanking is just one example of the kind of trauma that can start the sissyboy conflict. This conflict arises because parents raise young gay guys to be heterosexuals. The very essence of gay boys is often sensitivity, creativity and feminine play; an eccentric mix of boy-girl stuff.

Herein lies the primary problem: Society values masculine traits and mannerisms over feminine ones. One's deviation from the masculine norms is seen as an affront to the image dad has of "his" son. Have you ever heard "I'm gonna make you into a man if it kills you"? This is the attitude that many fathers and mothers have. This attitude may, in fact, end up killing their gay son.

So how does the sissyboy conflict emerge? The primary conflict starts with a traumatic incident, when the boy realizes it is not OK to be himself. This boy understands that when he acts like himself by showing feminine qualities he is given a negative response from parents, family and peers. A splintering effect occurs in the boy and, in essence, he creates a new self. This new self is more to the liking of his parents and peers. The boy puts away his true gay self to live in a hidden basement of his consciousness. Some young gay boys become depressed, anxious or isolated. Others have better coping skills and adapt to the expectations of the masculine society.

The sissyboy conflict plays out in the daily lives of gay men. I ran into a friend from college at a local bar. He is a very nice looking, well-built young man. He stated that while living in Los Angeles he was taking a class to become more masculine. "It actually works," he said. "I am becoming less queeny." I responded, to his dismay, that I was encouraging my feminine side to come out more—finding my "inner queen," so to speak.

Olympic skater Brian Orser told *The Ottawa Sun*: "Although I'm gay, I'm definitely a man on the ice." Elvis Stojko commented: "Brian never skated soft, he is masculine in his skating, he skates male and I respect that a lot."

Why does Orser have to justify his skating now that he's been outed? Why can't it just be his individual style of skating, masculine or not? To me, this screams sissyboy conflict:

Orser feeling shame about his wonderful feminine qualities and choosing to justify them to the world.

The splintering of the self between the authentic gay boy and the masculinized boy damages the health of gay men. Reaching adulthood, most gay men go through the coming out process. In doing so, many feel shame, guilt, or feelings that they are somehow strange or bad. These men need to cope and deal with these feelings.

Many turn to drugs, alcohol, or multiple sex partners to help deal with the conflict inside.

Until gay men really deal with this conflict, they will continue to have unresolved and conflicted feelings. One way to overcome the sissyboy conflict is to discover your authentic self. Part of your authentic self is the 6-year-old boy in his beaded gown. Your authentic self may also be the part of you you're

ashamed of and don't want anyone else to see or hear. Your authentic self also includes your creativity, spirituality, sexuality and physicality. Discovering your authentic self is difficult because your hurt and pain tells you, "If you act real, you will be hurt again."

You are an adult now and you can protect yourself from being hurt. You do not need to let your parents belittle you anymore. You have choices. You may continue to use drugs, alcohol and sex to cover the pain or you can choose to seek out counseling, Alcoholics Anonymous and other ways to heal.

Being the tough guy society needs is not about the truck you drive, or how much muscle you have. Being really tough is confronting your own true self and healing the pain that holds you hostage.

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OUTWORD is written by members of Portland Gay Men Writing. Writers interested in contributing should call Alan or Geoffrey at 223-5907.



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