

Mean Grrrls

Our summer-that-almost-didn't-happen is finally winding down and as kiddies everywhere traipse back to our hallowed halls of learning, I'm reminded how we never outgrow the social structure of high school. I mean, think about it—our social strata, whether you're gay or straight, has remained the same since our teens.

Like the quintessential pre-drugged out, pre-necklace filching Lindsay Lohan movie *Mean Girls*, we can be broken down into specific cliques and groups. There are jocks, nerds, outcasts... the list goes on. And then, of course, there's the popular group—the ones people wish they could be, the ones much emulated. In *Mean Girls*, this group was called the "Plastics." The Plastics—especially the leader, Regina—were portrayed as, you guessed it, mean girls. In the real world, the Plastics would be called "A Listers," and if they were gay, they'd be called "A Gays."

An "A Gay" is a person of homosexual persuasion who is rich, upwardly mobile, well connected, influential and, more often than not, good looking. I first came across the term while reading Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City* not long after coming out. In the novel, A Gays are depicted in an unflattering fashion—wealthy, influential yet pretentious, mean and bitchy old queens. But this was



panda say what?!

BY BENNIE TAN

No one is born an asshole—you have to want to be one. While being gay is not a choice, being a bitch is.

Maupin's intention—in a November 2010 interview with *Lambda Literary* online, he said, "When I invented the term 'A Gay,' I meant it with utter contempt and ridicule." Perhaps it is for this reason many gays do not enjoy being referred to as an A Gay.

This negative stereotyping has survived, certainly not helped by such programs as Logo's *The A List: New York*. I must confess I watched the pilot (purely for research purposes) and was so put off by the backstabbing bitchiness I quit the series after only one episode. I simply couldn't stomach it and still lament the wasted hour of my life.

In Beardom, "A Gays" are called "A Bears." These are Bears who tend to be better off financially, well connected and also "bearier" than other Bears. Due to the negative stereotyping attached to A Gays, many A Bears dislike being categorized as such. In fact, A Bears is a much maligned topic and not often spoken of. A friend of mine has asked me to

not refer to anyone using the term, as he finds it offensive. Even Malcolm Ingram—acclaimed director of the documentary *Bear Nation*—danced around the issue when an audience member asked him about it after a screening at last year's Portland Lesbian and Gay Film Festival.

I personally think it's kind of funny how folks are afraid of this term. Just because people consider someone an "A Bear" doesn't automatically make the person a "Mean Grrrl." No one is born an asshole—you have to want to be one. While being gay is not a choice, being a bitch is.

A very wise uncle of a superhero once said, "With great power comes great responsibility." As an "A Bear," the individual can wield his substantial influence and use it for good and the betterment of the community. I know quite a few A Bears who are already doing it, and our community is a better place because of their efforts. However, due to the negative connotations attached to the term, some of these individuals are not comfortable being referred to as A Bears—so I am naming no names, as it would be grounds for a mauling of epic

proportions.

This is not to say all "A Bears" are angels and use their power (I'm using this word in the loosest sense) for good. There are some A Bears out there who like nothing more than to be bitchy, cruel and judgmental. Some flaunt their wealth or good looks and boast about whom they know. I hope these individuals will one day remember where they came from and realize they don't have to act like a "see-you-next-Tuesday." At the end of the day, we are all the same and they don't have to be a "Mean Grrrl." To the people they belittle and hurt, remember: You afforded them the title of A Bear and you have the ability to strip them of their "crown" at any time. To paraphrase Eleanor Roosevelt, no one can make you feel bad if you don't let them.

As for myself, much like Kathy Griffin, I don't consider myself an "A Lister" or an "A Bear." I'm not upwardly mobile or important enough, nor am I a classic Bear specimen. At best, I'm on the "B- List" (that's minus)—though after this column, I may be relegated to the "D List." No matter, I'll slum it with Kathy any day. ☐

Does The A List: New York have any redeeming qualities? Bennie wants to know. Email him at pdxpandacub@gmail.com.

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