



Shame on You

A guest writer explains why "gay shame" can be the worst shame of all

By Nate Young

Just the other day my fashion-savvy friend and teammate Josh proposed starting a new trend, to bring back the cut-off jean shorts from the 1980s, but not the "Village People gay type," rather the '80s "frat type." He proposed we make a pair and wear them, and that it would "be OK" because he was straight so I wouldn't "have to worry."

Josh is one of my best friends, someone whom I respect – but he crossed the line, and I let him know – in jest because he was "just kidding." My question is, would other gay males, even out and proud, do the same or would they be afraid to "rock the boat" or "make a big deal out of nothing"? I suspect that not only would the average gay male fail to defend himself (even in jest) in a similar situation, but chances are he would also offer the same comments as my teammate did to ensure protection from stereotyping, labeling and feared social ridicule!

This might stem from a belief among men (gay, bi and straight) that heterosexual men have the last word on "masculinity." A rampant and persistent self-hatred seems to exist among gay and bisexual men that perpetuates this attitude within both that gay/bi male and straight male communities.

A study I read by Ilan H. Meyer and Laura Dean discussed internalized homophobia and self-doubt as symptoms of "minority stress" among gays ("Internalized Homophobia, Intimacy, and Sexual Behavior among Gay and Bisexual Men." Stigma and Sexual Orientation). Just what is minority stress? Basically, it's the stress caused by being different all the freakin' time! It makes some of us more resilient, tough, funny, and savvy; and it makes others of us depressed, bulimic, suicidal, and ashamed.

What are day-to-day examples of this self-hatred and shame? Well, for one, the term "straight-acting." It would be funny if we used this term for gay or bisexual men who didn't bathe, dressed terribly, and burped in public, but we don't. A non-straight athletic man with a firm handshake, square jaw, and an unwavering deep voice is a "straight-acting homo."

Other examples include the sudden change to pianissimo tone when invoking the term "gay," or "lesbian," e.g.:

Str8 guy: Dude, where were you last Thursday?

Gay guy: I went to Raleigh with some friends.

Str8 guy: Oh cool, what for?

Gay guy: Um it was hip-hop night at CC's

Str8 guy: Cici's Pizza?

Gay guy: No, its a *gay* club

Many men – gay, bi and straight alike – say "gay" like my grandma says "black." However, I argue that the former is more distressing than the latter, because the former is said by these same non-straight men, while the latter is said by a Southern, white, 85-year-old woman set in her ways. No African-American proclaims her or his own race with a shameful lowered tone, and neither should any bisexual or gay man about his sexuality.

In addition, non-heterosexual men will often condemn one another for sleeping around while they tolerate or even admire the straight male who gets it on four times a week with four different "honeys." Our own people will call each other "slut" and "tramp" for doing the same things that straight males get away with day in and day out.

Is there any worse hatred than self-hatred? This question is not so rhetorical – in fact, I'll give you a concrete response. No. Self-hatred is indeed the worst kind of hatred because it feeds hatred of others. Self-hatred in gay and bisexual men eventually may lead to resentment and fear of straight people. That explains the near violent reaction by several gay men I witnessed in a gay bar a few months ago when they saw a different-gender couple kissing "in their territory."

Can we ever expect heterosexual men to respect us if we do not respect ourselves? Most of the homophobic banter I hear is in jest, but I quickly defend myself with similar tone. It is vital that we learn to defend ourselves against homophobia – and more importantly, it is vital that we recognize our own internalized homophobia.

So let's take the inner-homophobe within each of us and ball it up and *squish* it. That is the first step toward gaining our self-respect. And self-respect is the quintessence of LGBTIQ pride. [λ]

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