

Society's sex stereotypes?

exist male

them. That won't be easy because those qualities are big liabilities in the 'man' game. They are what make up a 'sissy'. But if we can learn them, then some day in the rosy future, we'll be able to meet women as equals.

Joseph Pleck wrote a very good article about male competition including its effect on malefemale relationships in the April 11, 1974 issue of WIN magazine. I recommend it highly.

A fear I have about making these changes is that I'll occasionally be assumed to be homosexual. That fear has the effect of keeping me, and all who share it, acting beligerent.

Last January, I started taking Changing Men (the men's liberation newsletter from which this article is reprinted) around to stores to see if they'd display it where people could pick it up. I daydreamed about how I'd respond if someone said "Oh, isn't this that faggot organization?" By March I was still running through the same daydream even though the situation had never come up. I had to admit it was a charged situation for me, and the charge became because the person asking the question would be assuming I was gay.

I spent last year working in a small tool shop. One day I was labeling a box we used. Being bored, as usual, I started putting decorations around the label. It was fun, one of the few creative moments I'd had at that job. Then it occurred to me that the wavy curly-cues I was enjoying drawing would look girlish next to the straight letters on the other boxes. I drew a little more, but the fun was definitely gone.

Faggot jokes and stories were very common at work. I doubt many of the men had contact with real gay people, but the subject kept coming up anyway. A co-worker told me he stopped in a bar and halfway through his beer realized it was a gay bar. He was so disgusted he didn't finish his drink.

Fear of Homosexuals

Where does this fear and repulsion in straight men come from? I think that sleezy feeling comes from the belief that homosexuals want to touch us. Want us to passive while they do things to our bodies. We get a creepy crawly feeling of being manipulated. We're the ones who are supposed to do the maintaining...on women.

We get nervous when somebody touches our bodies. Like when a stranger touches my bike or car or (I suppose) sword. I get instantly alert. They could hurt it, but mostly they just shouldn't be touching it.

Our bodies are important weapons in the struggle for respect, and homosexuals allow their weapons to be touched in the most intimate ways. Their defenses have been breached. They've let an opponent get inside. It's a much-passed-around bit of straight folk knowdegle that even football players and weight-lifters can be queers. They're men on the outside but rottne soft inside. It's interesting that letting a woman touch you doesn't compromise a man in the same way. She's not a potential enemy. She's more like the squire getting you ready for battle.

Homosexuals seem to me to be equivalent to the communist menace of the McCarthy era. They're poisoning our white-knight ethic. They can be anywhere, even the highest places. The locker rooms of the NFL. No one is above suspicion. And, like the fifties, there's no sure way to prove cleanliness. But you can make things a lot easier on yourself by conforming, by being 'one of the boys'. When I was in high school, 'faggot' was an all-purpose insult, but it was used go along with the group. Wouldn't cheat on a test, join in a prank, leer at Playboy.

Good Company

For fear my main thought may have gotten lost, I'd like to try and condense it one last time: I want to have real relationships with people, not the kind that still leave me lonely. I'm realizing that a picture I've had of myself as strong and capable, and able to compete has gotten in the way of those real friendships, and so I want to drop it. I've transmitted that picture to other people by the way I've used my body as weapon. I'll have to be ready to be treated like 'sissy' or 'faggot' by some people. Harder still, I'll have to get positive about those words in my mind. Only when I'm proud of myself as sissy and faggot will I be able to approach other men and women clearl, and with them become all that I can be.

Accepting those labels gets easier all the time as I find out what good company it puts me in.



By Danny Lewis reprinted from Changing Men