

## **Masculinity, Athleticism and the Many Other Complications of Sexuality in a Newly-Trump World**

I've always struggled somewhat with the fact that I'm gay. Today, society prides itself in the acceptance of all people, and the fact that anyone can be who they want. Yet I still feel a pressure to conform to the archetypal roles of masculinity, not because of external pressures like family and friends, but from myself. I'm afraid to single myself out, to enable myself in a way that may limit me socially or romantically in the future. I can be self-hating sometimes, only because I feel like I'm not masculine enough, not manly enough. But why do I have to be masculine? Why do we feel this need to be a manly man, when most of my interest pertains to what people consider 'feminine'?

I think a lot of my insecurities have to do with my childhood obsession with superheroes. When you think of superheroes, you think of masculinity, athleticism, power; the epitome of perfect human form. This ideal of masculinity and physical perfection is idolized in the gay community, and it contributes to the feeling of inadequacy being widespread in gay culture. The first character I was ever attracted to was a young Marvel superhero named Wiccan (this was before Chris Evans' Captain America). He was part of a group of teenage superhero group called the Young Avengers, and he and one of his teammates, a massive half-alien called hulkling, were a couple. The idea that two powerful, un-effeminate men could be superheroes and also be a gay couple really opened my eyes as a kid. I was probably nine or ten when I first read the Young avengers series. Since then, there has been an influx of LGBTQ characters in both Marvel and DC comics - a way to keep up with the times and to hold gay fans interest. However, this heroic influence is only the beginning of the roots of my dissociation.

I have always been a fairly athletic guy, I never really enjoyed playing sports, at all, but people seemed to think I should because of my build and my family and my gender. My parents are both very active people (my mom is a personal trainer and my dad is a black-belt in Krav Maga), and while growing up this influenced me and the sports I played. From the time I was seven til I was thirteen, I played basketball, baseball, rugby, I swam, I ran, I did gymnastics; and I hated all of it. In middle school I played football at lunches with the boys, not because I wanted to but because I felt as though I needed to, to fit in. I think bad about the times when I played sports now, and sometimes I find myself wanting to play again. Partially to feel close to people of my gender again, but also to feel camaraderie that only comes from a team, and merely to play something again. Yet in the end I know that whatever it is close to play or do, the idea of what it is in my head will not live up to what it is in reality - and in the end, I know I won't enjoy it.

Masculinity, as a concept, is so fragile. Straight men actively try hard not to appear too weak or too feminine, and it can sometimes have lasting affects on their self-image. Boys seem to try and have a bravado of their masculinity; they compete to be the most truly manly man, the best athlete, the guy with the most "kills", bragging about their sexual conquests like they're deer during a hunt. I consider myself fairly masculine, but I think that is partially because I'm not afraid to have a feminine side. My masculinity is complicated, because it doesn't conform to the traditional idea of masculinity. I have a fairly deep voice, without a stereotypical 'lisp', and I don't carry myself in a way that immediately alerts people to my sexuality, yet I'm not afraid to do that either, should the opportunity arise. I don't really know the extents of my masculinity, as I am still learning about myself as a person, as a friend, as a gay man. There are still many questions I have about myself that are yet unanswered - and that's ok.

Homophobia is something I never really had to deal with till somewhat recently. In middle school, I was still very much in the closet, although I still sometimes questioned myself. My friends and I back then led very simple lives, playing football, eating food, playing video games, and talking about memes. There was no animosity in anything we ever did. It was not until high school that I experienced any resistance for not being straight. It was in grade 10; me and my friends had an argument with a bunch of the football team. They were all a year older than we were - we'd never really gotten along with any of them, our groups always kind of clashed. There had just been a confrontation between our two groups, it was about a week after one of my friends at the time and one of the football players had gotten suspended for fighting. When they were allowed back to school, the football played was filled with hate, obviously he blamed us, and he and I were on especially bad terms. For the next couple months, when I'd walk down the halls, I'd hear "faggot" and "gay". It didn't really do much, because I never really valued anything they said to me, but just the experience itself is something that will stick with me forever, and is one I never hope to experience again.

The American elections have opened the eyes of many people to the pure hatred that exists today in the world for the "other". Together. Donald Trump and Mike Pence will send the United States into a regression of potentially 50 years, creating a zeitgeist of bigotry and hate that we haven't seen since the sixties and the dawn of the civil right movement. Black people will be targeted. Hispanic people will be targeted. Gay people will be targeted. Muslim people will be targeted. Trans people will be targeted. Women will be targeted. No one who is not a cisgendered heterosexual white male, will be safe from the potential wrath of the Tump-Pence government. And that is a very scary thought for me as part of the community of "other".

Although I am obviously not in the states, so much of Canadian and international culture revolves around the US, and so much will change under their law. NO one knows the extent this new American will reach, but the possibilities are terrifying, and make the idea of being not straight in America, or any western country, somewhat less safe.

I think that gay people in today's day and age are much more fortunate than those of past generations, yet I also think we still have a long way to go. I am secure in myself, in my sexuality; but I still question myself sometimes, find doubts in myself due to my social surroundings. It's a complicated world, and there are many different opinions that exist, some that contrast and others that don't as much. But there will always be people who oppose you in one way or another. I think that it's important to know yourself and to learn to be "ok" with who you are, so that you aren't fazed by the opinions of others. I'm gay; I'm proud of that; I don't want or need to hear the opinions of people who think differently. What they have to say is irrelevant to me. I am secure in myself, and finally after many years, I am happy.