



MEN OF ALL COLORS TOGETHER/NY
Celebrates the 20th Anniversary
of the Stonewall Rebellion

and cordially invites you to its
DRAG BALL & DISCO

In honor of the Drag Queens who
started it all!



Saturday, June 17th, 9:00 pm-2:00 am at 135 W. 14th Street,
2nd floor. Costume/Drag (of choice) is proudly encouraged but not
required; there will be a dress-up area and clothes check. Admission \$10,
\$7 for MACT/NY members; For more info, call 245-6366.

Flyer: David Housel and Eric Perez

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—David Housel, Reflections of A Drag Queen
Striving Towards Political Correctitude

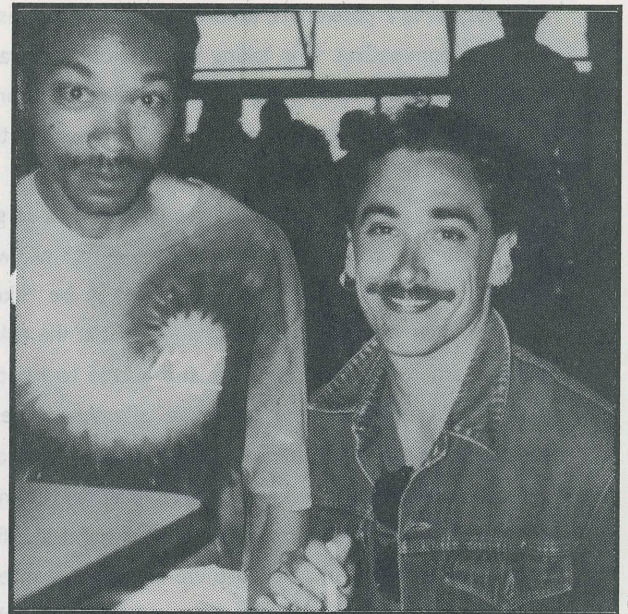


Photo: David Mills

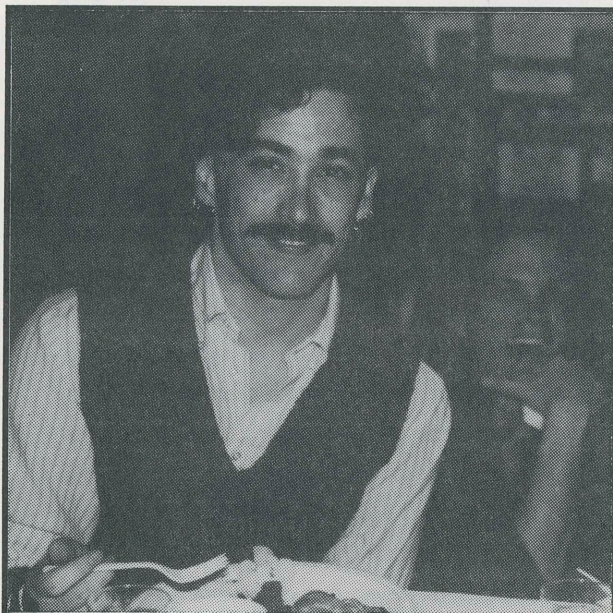


Photo: Tom Doremus

Reflections of a Drag Queen Striving Towards Political Correctitude

by David Housel

From the time I ran to my Barbie doll and beat her peroxide blonde hair into the most garish styles...from the time I stole into my mother's closet and vogued in her wigs, dresses, and heels...I have been a drag queen. All of the people that I have loved and admired most have been drag queens — Ross, Madonna, Sylvester, my mother. Being a drag queen is more than looking "real" in a dress or enduring the bondage of stiletto pumps, it is a mentality. It is a passionate embrace of life and a disregard for convention. It is taking oppression and transforming it in self-empowering ways. It is a flagrant expression of one's inner strength and courage in a world that disapproves of such displays of individuality.

Male drag queens attack the premises and value systems that fuel and perpetuate sexism. After all, why would a man relinquish power in order to be "like a woman?" Why would a man be pro-feminist at the risk of giving women equal opportunity and access to needed resources? Can a man who is seen as "effeminate" be an outspoken leader and political activist in the lesbian and gay community? Do you feel comfortable allowing him to represent your issues and concerns? This mindset often scapegoats drag queens because we are seen as threats to gay men's sense of themselves as men who love other men or as some bizarre cooptation to the heterosexual model with its gender-specific roles and expectations.

One thing that I have found perplexing in my life within the BWMT/MACT (Black and White Men Together/Men of All Colors Together) network is how little attention is given to the issue of sexism despite its prominence in our professed statement of purpose. Perhaps we are shying away from the issue that fundamentally challenges our core identification and the privilege that we all share — our sense of power and entitlement as men in a patriarchal society. As we learn to "live, love, and work together,"* we must not only examine our relationships with women and heterosexual/bisexual men but also our relationships with one another and

how sexism and unquestioned male privilege impact upon and oppress these interactions.

Drag queens and other women-identified men are reactions to the society constructs of "masculine" and "feminine" and how different attributes and judgments are ascribed to these constructs in the American enculturation/socialization process. A woman-identified man, by my definition, is one who embraces and exults those qualities within himself that our society defines as "feminine" or "feminist" and, by so doing, essentially challenges the arbitrary and pejorative connotation that is placed upon these characteristics. For example, being nurturing, communicative, and emotionally available are within the realms of being human and ought not be excluded from the male experience. In this sense, the personal becomes the political as one's natural tendencies and their expression attack our present reality, which is, in my opinion, sorely in need of reformulation.

Drag queens are anything but inconspicuous and have always been on the cutting edge of the lesbian and gay liberation movements. Their presence, however, has not been free of controversy or criticism. Many feminists — lesbian, separatist, or otherwise — criticize drag queens as yet another manifestation of how men use male privilege to denigrate and mock women. After all, drag queens have the luxury and option of returning to the male role/persona and reaping the benefits of our sexist society. Women do not have that option or mobility. The exaggeration and flamboyance of most drag queens is seen as promoting the objectification and subjugation of women by amplifying one aspect of male-defined femininity for one's own self-aggrandizement. This truncated portrayal of women is seen to come from a perspective of male entitlement that ultimately dehumanizes and exploits women in ways that lead to various forms of oppression, including violence, rape, and societal/economic disenfranchisement.

I would argue, however, that drag queens endure an

oppression that has its roots in the sexism experienced by women. After all, who fought back at the Stonewall and revitalized the current lesbian and gay liberation movement in this country — drag queens, women, and people of color. Why? Because these people, who had already been marginalized and trivialized by the powers that were, were sick of being excluded, and had more to gain from revolutionary change.

There is a belief I hold dear that the men who wear the heels turn the wheels. Perhaps this radical spirit stems from oppression saturation and frustration that energizes a quest for a more equal, just, and inclusive society, with more democratic access to needed resources and opportunities. MACT/BWMT chapters have not been free from this more insidious expression of sexism.

While I served as white co-chair of MACT/NY's Board of Directors, many primarily white members did not perceive my more nurturing style and my proclivity toward collectivity and consensus as true leadership. After all, I was not a visionary who pressed forward with a certain agenda. I failed to inspire others in the organization to embrace and implement my proposals, despite the fact that, within my biased mind, others had limited access and impact upon this creative process. I experienced their expectation as both sexist and racist, coming from places of both male and white privilege. Only after I reminded them of the ways that my style had increased membership and participation within the organization, had nurtured coalition with other groups, had furthered our relationships with lesbians in our community and had enhanced the quality of our ongoing work and programming, could they recognize and acknowledge my contributions to the group. The need for this type of consciousness raising process is a sad commentary indeed, and, once again, relies upon those who are oppressed to do the educating.

In another chapter, I know of a very outspoken, woman-identified man who also happens to be perceptive, articulate, intelligent, and politically savvy. When he stated his desire to chair the group's political action committee, his request was met with utter incredulity. He was politely dismissed and relegated to the social committee. After all, a drag queen surely could not deal with "hard" political things nor represent the organization publicly and should more appropriately invest his energy into entertaining the "real" men of the group. The blatant

sexism in this interaction should be self-evident. Our mandate to deal with sexism must surely focus on our relationships with women and how we interact with them. Are women given equal access to the planning process in community events? Are we open to dialogue with women and do we incorporate their input and suggestions into joint activities or are they dismissed? Do we reflect upon our interactions with women and do we try to alter patterns that women experience as oppressive or exclusive? In what ways is our language sexist or misogynist — how often do you say "bitch," "cunt," "fish," "Miss Thing" or refer to men as "she"? These questions must be integrated into the ongoing consciousness raising process that is the hallmark of our organization. I also want to propose a more personal challenge. I want us to examine how we respond to and interact with the women-identified men in our organization. Do we fall into the all-too-common pattern of denigrating those that we find sexually unappealing? Do we focus on one aspect of a person's being and totally discount them and their capacity to be valuable contributors to the organization? How do you feel when you see a man in a dress or someone you see as a "sissy" or a "queen?" What is your response when someone challenges your sexist language or promotes feminist beliefs? Talking the politically correct talk about sexism is always easier than translating those words into action. But, if we are to maintain our credibility and integrity as individuals and as an organization, we must take that hard, scrutinizing look at ourselves and make those needed changes in how relate to women and to one another.

THIS ESSAY IS DEDICATED TO THE MEN OF MEN OF ALL COLORS TOGETHER/NEW YORK WHOSE LOVE AND SUPPORT HAS GIVEN ME ADDED STRENGTH TO SPEAK MY TRUTH IN MANY FORUMS.

Essay also to be published in the forthcoming "National Association of Black and White Men Together Journal, Vol. IV: Living, Loving & Working Together."

**"Living, Loving and Working Together" is the theme of the 1991 Convention of the National Association of Black and White Men Together*