

Sissyphobia: Gay Men and Effeminate Behavior

Tim Bergling

Harrington Park Press (June 2001)

\$29.95 (133pp)

978-1-56023-989-5

Most men, including gay men, when in the presence of effeminate gay men, look at them with nervous disdain, even disgust. Masculine gay men often find sissies as distasteful, if not more so, than do straight men.

Bergling, an ex-marine, who has been out of the closet for more than twenty years, has written a book that explores just what it is about effeminate gay men that so many find abhorrent. Expanding upon an article he wrote for *Genre* magazine in 1997, Bergling investigates why some gay men are more masculine than others and why society (and gays in particular) finds effeminate men so objectionable.

In researching *Sissyphobia*, Bergling developed a questionnaire answered by hundreds, both straight and gay. He interviewed many who completed his questionnaire, along with geneticists, biologists, queer theorists, psychotherapists, and counselors. He also faced his own prejudices.

Bergling theorizes that straight men find effeminate gay men offensive not only because they are gay but because many straight men also find women objectionable too. Effeminate men unite two different prejudices into their psyche (gay and feminine). In a male-dominated society that favors men over women, men that are more feminine are castigated. Bergling further cites research concluding that homophobic straight men are more likely to have deep-rooted issues concerning their own sexual orientation than do more gay-accepting straight men.

The causation of masculine gay men loathing effeminate gay men is more complex. Many gay men see feminine gay men as the source of their problems. They believe that all gay men are viewed as feminine and they blame feminine gay men for prejudice directed towards all gays.

Many "straight-acting" gay men see effeminate gay men as slowing the process towards gays achieving equal rights. The masculine gay men point to press coverage of gay pride events where a small percentage of the attendees are drag queens and flamboyant men, yet the press coverage ignores masculine gay men.

Though politically incorrect to discriminate based upon religion, nationality, or race, masculine gay men often disparage more effeminate gay men through their comments and behavior and they don't feel guilty for doing so. Bergling states, "Little boys and girls are brought up thinking there's only one proper way to act. That's the bottom line of homophobia whether it's the phobia we feel ourselves, or the homophobia straight people have."

Sissyphobia covers a complex and unnerving topic with balance, honesty, and compassion.

JOHN R. SELIG (May / June 2001)

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