

Leather Scene

by Cain Berlinger

Combating racism means becoming a part of the community and fighting our battles from within. What happens when any of those doors seem slammed shut. Men Of Discipline, a leather BDSM fraternity, was accused of doing just that. I had the privilege of speaking with MOD D.C. founding member, Lt. Colonel Ron Meshanko, on the alleged racist policies of MOD.

MOD DC (MODSF) is an alternative BDSM fraternity for gay men serious about the leather/uniform lifestyle, bridging the OLD and NEW guard, attracting those interested in BDSM into the leather tribe. Enforcing the disciplines of SM & Leathersex, expanding limits, control, dominance—submission, authority, rules, punishment, etc. We are also talking about behavior patterns, the way a person acts, the manner in which a person conducts himself.

CB: Is MOD racist?

RM: MOD has had the stigma of being a neo-Nazi group because of our military discipline and uniforms. Our magazine did a story about MOD in 1996 that made references to us as being "neo-Nazi" in appearance. We are totally dedicated to inclusivity and have people of color and Jewish members, one of our founders was Puerto Rican. Recruits are observed to see that they respect everyone regardless of sex, age, creed, and race. We do not accept members who manifest any discriminatory behaviors or who adhere to ideologies that discriminate against others.

CB: Does MOD feel unfairly challenged as a group because of this image?

RM: Many Gay men discriminate against women, and heterosexuals as much as POC. MOD has been very active in coalition building with various groups in the leather tribe to be more inclusionary of everyone



MOD have to go the extra mile to disprove unfair rumors leveled against us. Our uniforms draw attention to us. We have the responsibility to ensure that we present an image that is true to the mission and purpose of the fraternity.

CB: What are you doing in the way of outreach into the communities?

RM: This past year we accepted our first African-American member and our first transgendered male member. We've had public demos in which women have participated. The problem is public misconception and ignorance, prejudice and bigotry, homophobia and SMphobia. Two female Black title holders marched with us at NYC Gay Pride in 1996. Jill Carter flogged me on P Street in Dupont Circle during BHT's leather carnival, and still the rumors fly!

CB: Will MOD be the catalyst to flushing out racists in the community?

RM: I have told at least three men that MOD would not accept their applications because they told me they were glad we did not have any Black members (at the time), horrified, I informed them that this was against our Codes of Discipline.

Unfortunately, some people like to hold on to their ideas, they WANT us to be a certain way and we are adamant in stating "no!" We have received many disparaging comments from leather men/fraternities for associating with women. It is an awkward position to be in, particularly when a man that I lust after, and discriminatory comments come from him changing that lust to disgust

and sadness. We say we are one Leather Nation, ONE Leather Tribe, however, the seeds of discrimination are firmly planted within each of us. It takes time, reflection and action to boldly make change.

Send comments suggestions to

THY CUP RUNNETH OVER Transgendered Youths— Interview with Mercedes

by Lynnell
Stephani Long

"Your prejudice is not hurting me. Your prejudice and your bigotry are hurting your nieces, your nephews, your sons and your daughters. They are our future, and they may be Transgendered." — Lynnell Stephani (from my performance piece, "No More Pretending.")

It has always been my mission to do my best to reach out to transgendered youths. I remember when I was a teenager, I searched constantly for a role model. I found one, but she was a transgendered prostitute, named Roxanne. Back in the '70s, the only transgendered women that were visible on the South Side were the girls on the street. Although it was difficult for me to relate to them, it helped to know that I was not alone in my gender dysphoria.

I met Mercedes at the Unity Conference, in the ladies room. As we both touched up our make-up and lipstick, she felt self-conscious about her looks, and asked me did she look like a man. I told her no, that she was a beautiful woman, and asked her is she was she transgendered. She said yes, I then came out to her as Intersex. Her mouth dropped, and she complimented me on my beauty. We talked awhile, and I told her about my mission as a Trans/Intersex Activist. To my dismay she said she has never read BLACKLINES, and she wasn't aware of my column or the writing of HIV/AIDS activist,



Sanford Gaylord. I found Mercedes very interesting, and asked her for an interview. She agreed.

Mercedes is a 16-year-old transgendered teen. She says she has been aware that she is transgendered since the age of 13. "They (her family) didn't approve of it at first, now they are starting to approve of it. My cousin said since I'm starting to look more and more like a female, every time she sees me she would respect me and call me Mercedes." Mercedes goes to [redacted]. I asked her if the students at her school accept her, she said, "Some boys mess with me, but after awhile I learned to ignore them. Some of the people (at [redacted]) know me as Mercedes. My friends call me Mercedes."

Mercedes expressed an interest in taking female hormones. "It's hard for me to get consent (to take hormones) because I am a ward of the State. My guardian (her Aunt) doesn't want to give me consent to take hormones. The State won't give me consent. There was a lady that came and talked to me and told me she could fight DCFS and get my consent papers signed. They might sign them when I finish therapy (psychotherapy) or I might have to wait until I'm 18. She (her guardian/aunt) says she prefers for me not to change into a female in front of the kids. There are a lot of kids in the house. All of them (the kids) are starting to see me change slowly. My little cousin said I look pretty as a girl. It seems like the kids are starting to understand it," Mercedes said.

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What's The "411"

with Preston L. Shumaker
Smart Advice
with an attitude!



Take a Stand, MAN

What's up, readers. Traditionally, June has been designated as Pride month. So, my Brothers this column is for us! When developing this column a couple things have been running rampant into my consciousness. What are we doing for pride? What is true Manhood? What's that all about?

As I was pondering these questions driving into work on Lake Shore Drive, I waited in congestive traffic. As I waited, I decided to turn on the radio. As I was flipping channels, I recognized the familiar voice booming from the speaker. "In the News..." the male voice quipped. It was Tom Joyner. "What in hell is he talking about, now?" I questioned. Tom continued, "A gay business man from Boston is marketing a Gay Beer..." Tom and his cohorts, Jaye Anthony Brown and Sybil Wilkes, broke

out in laughter immediately and was trippin' out regarding this little juicy tidbit of news.

"Could you imagine?" One of them added.

"I guess it will be a LITE Beer!" Sybil chuckles. "Can you imagine, Player? What if you were REAL thirsty and this beer, this GAY beer was the cheapest beer? What would you do? Would you go and buy one?" Tom continuing his laughter.

"DAMN! I'll probably go and buy one! I'll just cover it up or better yet, I'll have to get MELVIN to go out and buy THOSE!" Jaye comments. (For those who may not know, Melvin is the flamboyant gay male personality on the Tom Joyner show on Friday mornings.)

Their laughter and the slapping of fives for a job well done, with this news commentary assaulted my soul. The

continued congratulations of one another cut my spirit like a knife!! You know the same people would be up in arms if someone made a crack like this about Black folks or Black straight women!! Now, my anger escalates. Now, I really began to wonder. How many other Black gay and bisexual males were listening to this nationally syndicated show, I thought to myself. Better yet, how many other Black folks agree with this sentiment? My anger bubbles and rises like a pressure cooker, steaming quickly out of control!

SO, What are you trying to say, Mr. Joyner? Gay men are not real men? Is that it? I hope someone will make a call. Yeah, maybe another gay brother will call in to the radio show and read these idiots; reclaim our collective dignity, I thought to myself. Gay and Bisexual brothers will not stand for this

invalidation. Someone must call and yell, "Yeah, Tom: Why not a gay beer?? While we're at it, why are you questioning my Manhood? My Maleness?"

I wait and I wait while sitting in congested traffic for that phone call. IT Never Came In. The issue faded away as quickly as the next song began. Soon, the traffic freed up a bit and I began to move. The disgruntled laughter served as an immediate reminder of how far we still need to go in many communities regarding sensitivity to GLBT issues. As I continued to venture down the freeway, it dawned on me that it was my responsibility to make that phone call! Why was I waiting on someone else to reclaim my own dignity?

In order for any progress to be made regarding negative attitudes and perceptions, more gay and bisexual brothers of all persuasions (from femme to butch) must dare to take a stand by becoming more visible! However, it starts with just one person standing up for what is right. After all, isn't that what true MANHOOD should be all about? Taking care of your own business?? When there are so many things going on concerning African-American gay and bisexual men, we need to be at the forefront regarding our business. Our health, lives, loves, and brotherhood is our responsibility and we must take ownership of them. Our challenge is to exhibit conscientious pride all year long by standing up for our lives and speaking out. Take some satisfaction in the work that you are doing to make this a better community for all. Gay and bisexual PRIDE, when you come right down to it, is only of value when it is put into action. After all, brother, isn't it about time to take a stand, for the true man you are? As always, Peace and love, Readers. Have a safe and productive pride month. Comments? Questions? Send me your vibes @

TRANS from 28

With so many organizations reaching out to LesBiGayTrans teenagers, I asked Mercedes "Is it effective. Do Black teenagers realize there are a lot of resources available to them?" She replied: "I really don't think they realize that, because it seems like they don't care. They try to make it seem like it's all about them, that no one cares."

Throughout the interview, Mercedes impressed me with her knowledge of self, and determination to be her true self. I asked Mercedes what did she want to be when she grows up. "What I want to be when I grow up," she said, "is a run-way Super Model, as a female or in PLAYBOY magazine. Nothing sexual, just posing—of course after the

surgery—I don't consider myself transgendered. I consider myself a heterosexual woman. I want to be a youth advocate for teenagers. There are a lot of teenagers that are scared to come out, or don't know how to come out. I'd like to be able to talk to them about it. I'll tell them to do what's best for them. Do what they think will make them happy. My Aunt Juliana and her husband Nathan are good to me, and have been helpful in my coming out."

With the spread of HIV & AIDS in the Black community, I asked Mercedes if she practices safe sex, and she said yes. I then asked if she thinks the majority of Black gay/trans teenagers are practicing safe sex. "Probably half practice safe sex, the other half don't,"

Mercedes said. "Some say they don't care—that it doesn't feel good with a condom on. What needs to be done is organizations that help teenagers need to advertise more. I used to see advertisements on the bus and El; I don't see them anymore."

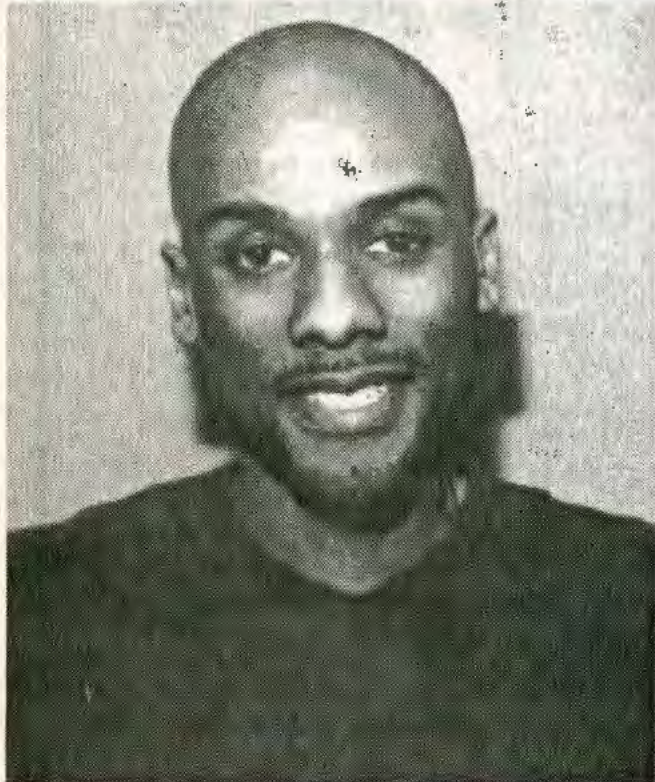
More and more LesBiGayTrans teenagers are coming out. Some don't know about the resources which are available to them. Like Mercedes said, there aren't much advertisements that let the teenagers know that there are places they can go for help. We all need to do more to reach our gay/trans brothers and sisters. Before it's too late.

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BLACK

LINES

June 1999, Vol. 4, No. 5 Free/\$2 outside Chicago EXPRESSIONS FROM BLACK GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDERED LIFE



reflections
Keith Boykin is on a spiritual quest for Black lesbigays. His new book has gone into a second printing.

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Photo by Patrick Robinson

youthspeak
Mercedes is a trans youth at [REDACTED] breaking down the barriers
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Photo by Lynnell Stephani



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