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The Big Apple brings out Bitch
By Trevor Hoppe
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I can't deny it: I heart NYC.

I took the weekend over Fall Break to spend a few days with my friends there, and generally distract myself from my graduate studies at the University of Michigan. While my stay was generally pleasant, I was confronted with a kind of insidious gay boy culture that revolves around fashion, judgment and superficiality. I'm speaking here of the archetype known as the Gay Boy Bitch.

You know who he is. His hip is cocked. His nose is up. And his opinions are generally sour. He was all around me in New York. I can spot him a mile away. I used to be him - and perhaps, from time to time, I still am.

Let me be clear: I understand that the Bitch is a response to homophobia and sexism. Channeling the Bitch for gay men is, first and foremost, a defense mechanism. It allows us to present a wall of impenetrability. With noses upturned and cutting wit, we appear to be wholly unaffected by homophobia.

In a culture that puts us squarely in last place, the Bitch gives us tools to convince others that we're in first. That we're simply above the reproach of heteros. Put simply, the Bitch is tremendously useful in convincing straight people that 1) we don't give a fuck what they think about us; and that 2) we will cut them if they give us any flack for being queer.

But here's the rub: just because it's a totally legitimate response to our culture, doesn't mean channeling the Bitch is always productive. While the Bitch might come in handy in the hormone-fueled tyranny of high school, the Bitch loses its utility in resisting heterosexism when it's just a bunch of gay men in a bar. If you've ever seen a dozen sissies in a room together, you know what I mean. Their hips cock to a degree not seen before. Their cutting wit bubbles over into a furious frenzy. A furious contest ensues to see who gets to be Queen Bitch.

This tendency for gay boys to turn the Bitch against one-another is what has me troubled. When I was visiting New York City over Fall Break, I found myself caught in a struggle to resist falling into a Bitchy rut. But when I got on the subway with a bunch of well-heeled fashionista gay boys on Saturday night, the Bitch in me reared its well-coiffed head. It's instinctual.

I don't know how to *be* around a bunch of other prissy sissy fags without conjuring the Bitch. Throughout my trip, several times I had to catch myself in mid-Bitch: "Honestly, what is she wearing?" Where did these thoughts come from? And more importantly, how do I make them stop? NYC brought out the Bitch in me - and that made me incredibly uncomfortable.

Can gay men be sissies while also resisting the Bitch? The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in San Francisco think so. They've developed a different way of being femme that refuses to channel the Bitch. Wearing colorful, campy versions of nun's habits with outrageous glittery makeup, they wanted to shake things up a bit in San Francisco when they first organized in 1979. Over the years, they've developed a generous, caring, and loving way of doing femme (they're almost motherly, really, minus the muscles

and armpit hair). They haven't left the Bitch's biting wit behind, but instead of aiming it at each other, they aim it our real enemies: homophobes and bigots.

Can we learn from the Sisters? Can the Bitches out there find another way to be that's more productive? More caring? More loving? I certainly hope so. Because being a Bitch is exhausting. And, really, while it has for me sometimes built camaraderie among sissies in my life, I've found that building real, meaningful friendships with other Bitches is something short of impossible. Frankly, in conjuring the Bitch, it's hard to have any positive emotions. I want more out of my friendships with other sissies - and more out of my community.

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