

OUT INFORM

Annual Issue, Vol 6
June 2016



OFFICIAL HOUSTON Pride Guide®

Houston LGBT Pride Celebration® and Houston Pride Week®

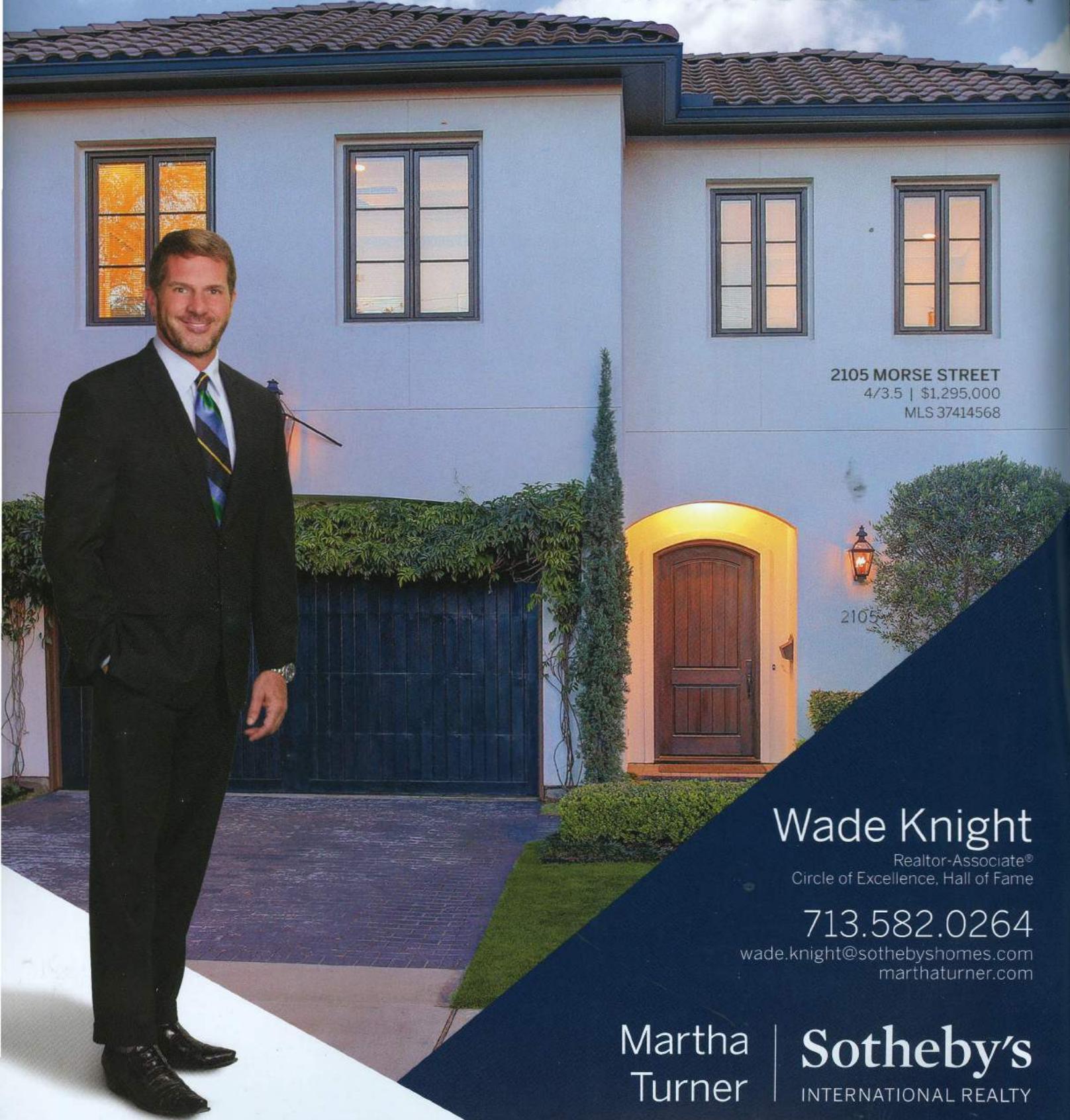
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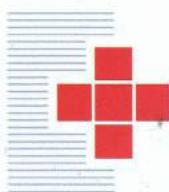


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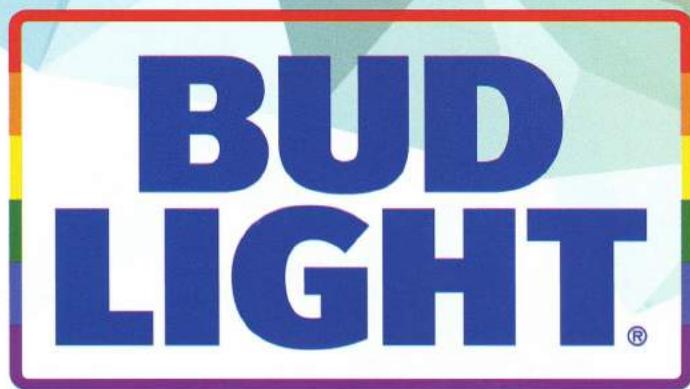
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HIV VACCINE

WHERE ARE WE?

BY BERNADETTE SIMPSON



HIV Vaccine: Where are we?

On May 18th, we celebrated HIV Vaccine Awareness Day. The goal of developing a safe and effective vaccine remains to be an overarching research priority and HIV Vaccine Awareness Day is meant to recognize and thank the thousands of volunteers, community members, health professionals, and scientists who are working together to make an HIV vaccine a reality. In the early days of the epidemic, many experts thought that we would have an effective vaccine within two or three years of the start of the epidemic. An effective vaccine teaches the immune system to recognize and respond to a specific harmful organism, and despite substantial advances in our understanding of HIV and the immune system, a successful HIV vaccine continues to present a number of scientific challenges.

In March 2016, Carl Dieffenbach, Director of the Division of AIDS at the National Institutes of Health, delivered a presentation on the current research and development of an HIV vaccine. There are currently two primary approaches being used to develop such a vaccine: an inductive (or empirical) approach and a deductive (or theoretical) approach.

The Inductive Approach

In 2009, a Thai clinical trial known as RV144 found 31% efficacy for a new HIV vaccine. RV144 tested a vaccine strategy that used a poxvirus-vectored vaccine called ALVAC-HIV to "prime" the immune system and a different protein vaccine called AIDSVAX to "boost" it. While the overall protection bestowed by the vaccine was modest, the implications were promising because the RV144 was the proof-of-concept that an AIDS vaccine could reduce risk of HIV acquisition in humans. The promising results of the study led to the formation of the Pox-Protein Public-Private Partnership (P5), a diverse group of organizations, including NIAID, committed to building on the success of RV144.

One of the partnership's early undertakings was starting the development to identify a vaccine candidate for eventual licensure. This included HVTN 100, a phase I/II clinical trial in South Africa. HVTN 100's early data demonstrated the safety and ability of the vaccine candidate to produce a robust immune response. Building on the success of HVTN 100, on HIV Vaccine Awareness Day, NIAID announced a decision to move forward with HVTN 702, a new Phase 2b/3 HIV vaccine efficacy clinical trial in South Africa beginning this year. Anthony S. Fauci, MD, Director of NIAID and co-founder of the trial has stated, "For the first time in seven years, the scientific community is embarking on a large-scale clinical trial of an HIV vaccine, the product of years of study and experimentation. A safe and effective HIV vaccine could help bring about a durable end to the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

and is particularly needed in southern Africa, where HIV is more pervasive than anywhere else in the world."

The Deductive Approach

Broadly neutralizing antibodies (bNAbs) are potent antibodies that have the ability to block a high percentage of global HIV strains from infecting human cells. These antibodies are detected in the plasma of only about 20% of people living with HIV, and normally only occur after two or more years after contracting the virus, which is too late to rid the individual of HIV infection. However, scientists believe that if a vaccine can somehow stimulate immune system to make bNAbs before they are exposed to HIV, the antibodies might protect those people from contracting HIV. Currently, researchers are identifying, creating, and testing numerous bNAbs in clinical trials.

Looking Forward

"An HIV vaccine is within our reach" Dieffenbach concluded optimistically in his presentation as he outlined his vision for the future. Vaccines have been historically the most effective means to prevent and eradicate diseases and thus, developing a safe, affordable, and effective vaccine could prevent HIV infection from uninfected people and ultimately end the HIV pandemic.

While the scientific community is optimistic about the possibility of a vaccine, it's important to be thoughtful about the scientific breakthroughs that continue to increase the health outcomes of people living with HIV as well as prevent people at-risk from HIV from being infected. Antiretroviral drugs for treatment and

prevention as well as PrEP for prevention have decreased the chance of transmitting HIV infection.

AIDS United is excited by the possibility of getting closer to the development of an effective HIV vaccine and supports ongoing scientific research that will help treat people living with HIV as well as prevent HIV acquisition in people at-risk for HIV acquisition.

Happy Pride, Houston!

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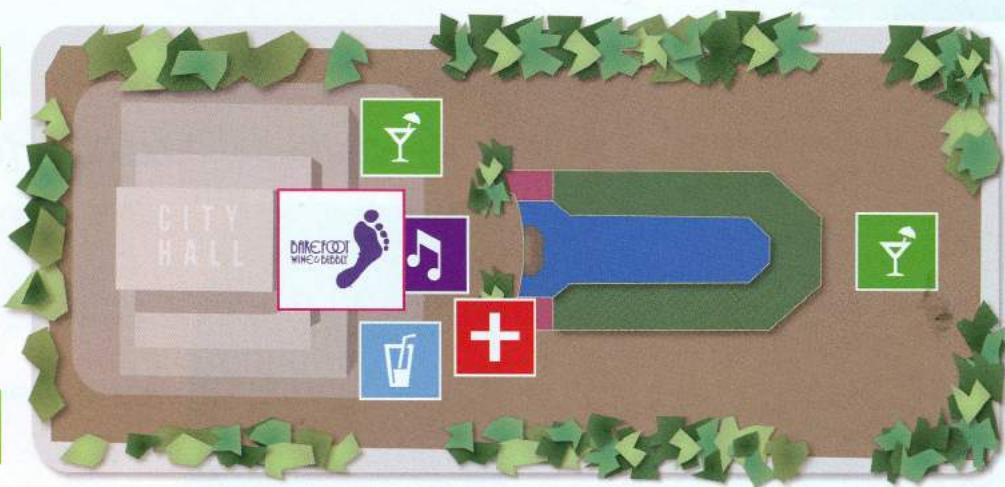
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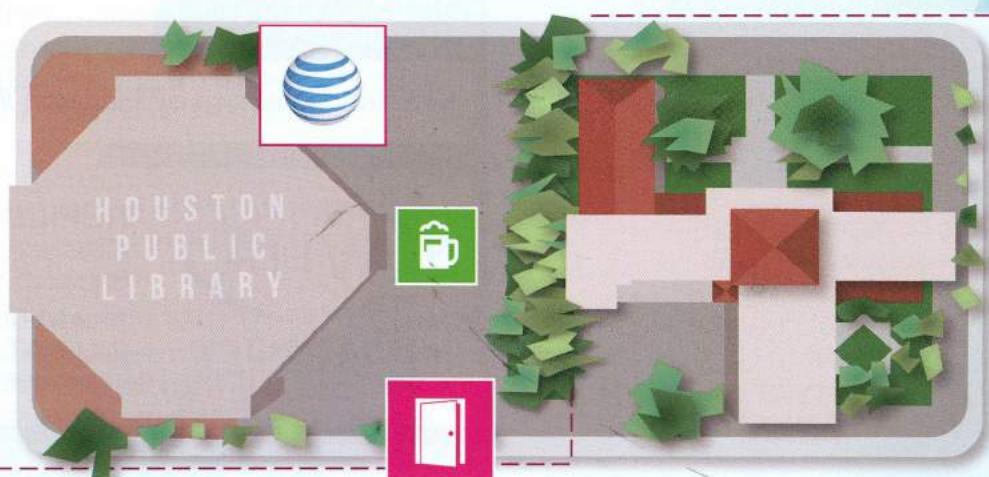


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- entrance
- first aid
- stage
- kids zone
- food
- water
- full bar
- beer

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PRIDE FESTIVAL GROUNDS

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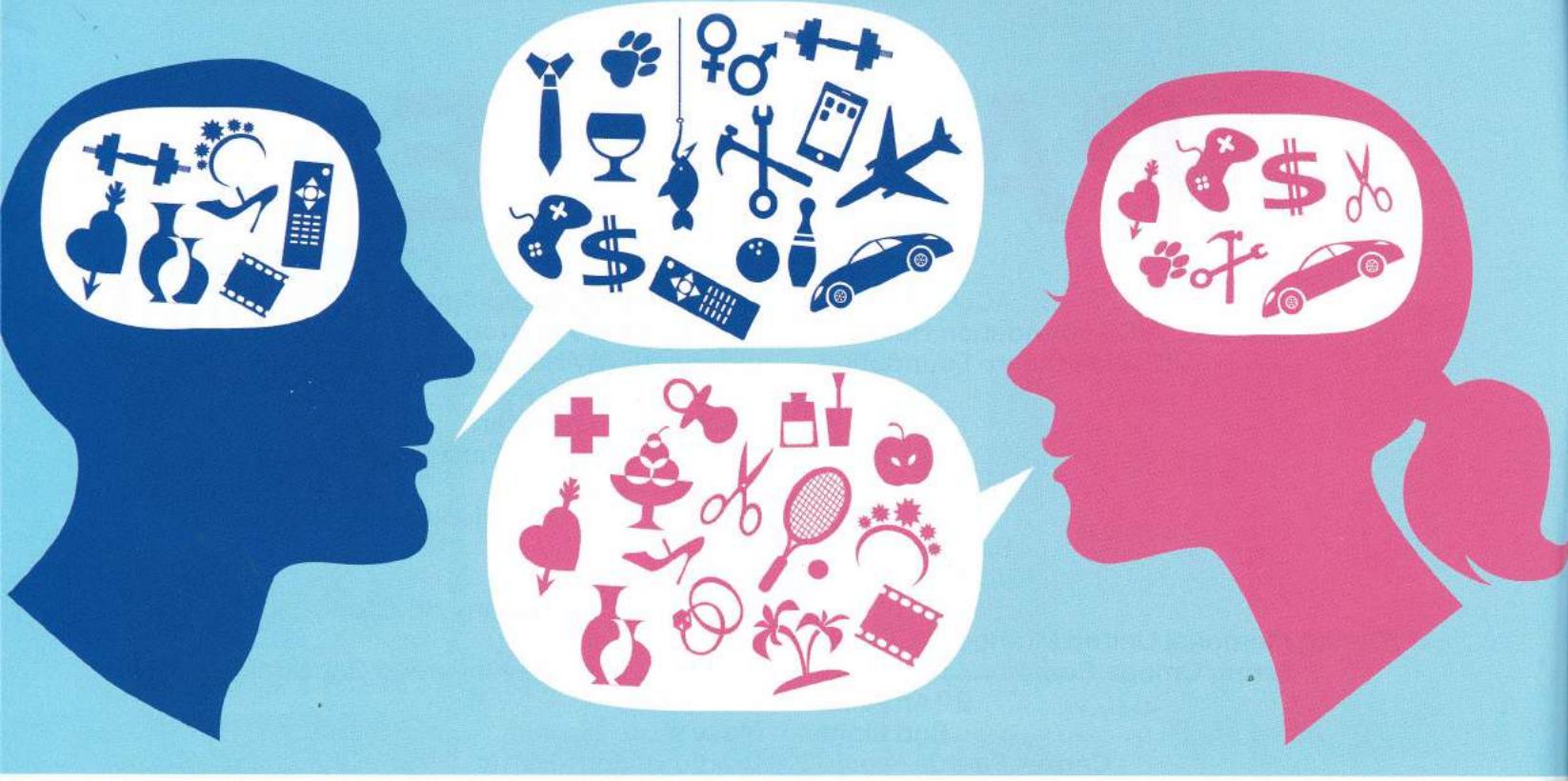


PARADE FINISH

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GENDER STEREOTYPING IN OUR CULTURE

BY JOSHUA N.
SERRATO

THE MOMENT IT STARTS

When children are born they are traditionally wrapped in either blue or pink blankets depending on their gender. Boy bedrooms are decorated with car and sports themes in mind, while girl bedrooms are decorated with flowers and princesses. Most parents feel obligated to continue this traditional way of thinking and pass down these habits to the younger generation. Those parents who don't carry on such practices are often shamed.

**“You’re a
man, act
like one!”**

Gender stereotyping has been an issue for me long before I came out to my family. It was something I've had to deal with since I was a child. I was more interested in watching romantic comedies and picking a weekend outfit than I was into Sunday's football game. For years, I felt like an outsider amongst my peers because I was interested in things girls were primarily supposed to be interested in. This made me feel embarrassed and ashamed to truly be myself. When a classmate made the football team everyone was supportive of him; however, I was mocked for being a singer in my school's choir. In their eyes I wasn't a "real man." Most people would like to believe that my personality and interests are due to me being gay, again enforcing yet another stereotype, yet in open conversation most would only reluctantly admit that interests and hobbies have little to if not any correlation to gender

or sexuality. Parents bound by this conservative gender ideology really should stop worrying about which of their children are playing with either dolls or toy cars. They should stop being concerned what others find acceptable and focus on the sole happiness of their children.

GENDER STEREOTYPING IN THE MEDIA

Whether intentional or not, the media is partly responsible for enforcing gender stereotypes. Let's take a look at your typical romantic comedy for example - A girl who is strong and independent is often viewed as a woman of power, she is praised for being different and although she is the hero of the story and the character you're supposed to root for, the writers can't help but make it seem like she is incomplete without a man in her life. At the end of the story she ends up finding the perfect male partner that completes her.

Don't get me wrong, it's perfectly fine for a woman to find love at the end of a story; however, let's look at a trending movie genre bound to be around for the next few years, superhero movies. See if you can spot the gender roles that these movies harmlessly project. The superhero is often a male character who is, more than likely an outsider, underdog or has some quality that exempts him from his peers. The female lead is undoubtedly beautiful and is always revealed to be the main hero's biggest weakness, talk about cliché! I love classic movies like Spider-Man or Superman but it's nice to see when the hero is female and her weakness is her male love interest instead, and for that we thank you Suzanne Collins for the Hunger Games.

"Let me get a guy to help you with that heavy lifting."

Music is yet another source that unfortunately falls victim to gender stereotyping. Men who enjoy pop music in an environment dominated by people who believe in gender stereotypes are often shamed by their taste in music. They have to pretend they don't like that new Taylor Swift song and instead they have to change to something that is ok for them to like according to their gender. When I used to work at a warehouse, right after high school, I remember having a radio station that I would tune to top 40 music while I did my work. The guys I worked would inevitably change my station and one of them even

said to me, "I just can't listen to that girl music." I could only sarcastically think to myself, "I didn't realize that when artists sit down to write new songs they write their new music targeting a specific gender." That belief was stupid then and it is still stupid now.

GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN THE LEGAL SYSTEM

It may seem like a harmless issue, but consider the practice of granting custody of children to the mother while the father is forced to pay child support. It wasn't until a few years back that the issue was brought to light and awareness was raised on the unfair and unequal treatment of fathers across America. While it is a great thing that men's parental rights are taken into account more now, what is truly frightening is that men had to struggle for the right to fight for their children. What makes a father less of a parent when it takes both to conceive?

THE ROLES THAT WOMAN ARE EXPECTED TO PORTRAY

A form in which some women are affected by gender stereotyping is that women are either consciously or subconsciously taught to be dependent on men. Most women are taught that a man has to be the provider and protector of the relationship. This can lead many women vulnerable and feeling that they would not be able to make it on their own. Imagine how different life would be if women were taught to be independent and to be their own provider instead of making them feel that sole job is only for men.

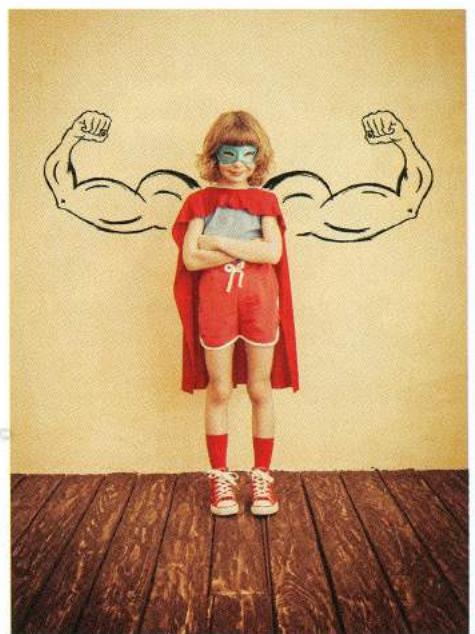
GENDER STEREOTYPING'S EFFECT ON THE LGBT COMMUNITY

Some gay men and women face a lot of persecution and discrimination for being who they are in their everyday life. While many men and women in the LGBT

community are able to blend in with their peers, many others are not. Gay men, who are naturally flamboyant, often feel a sense of shame in their work place for being themselves. Many gay men tone down their natural personalities in order to conform to society to allow their coworkers to feel comfortable. Lesbians, who are considered too butch for their environment, also feel at times, that they have to be less "manly" so that they won't put themselves in a situation where they could lose their job or be isolated from their peers.

Why is it that there are only two possible ways to be, the social-standard of feminine or masculine? According to how others view you, if you're a male or female who is, what is considered, "masculine" then automatically that means that you're attracted to women, while if you're a male or female that is, what is considered, "feminine" then you're automatically attracted to men. Gender stereotyping affects the LGBT community because it makes "feminine" gay men and "masculine" lesbians easy targets to harass in school, work, or in any other place that people from different social groups would be put together

Continued...



AN EXPERIMENT

To dive deeper into the issue, a few questions were composed relating to gender stereotypes. One boy and one girl whom break the stereotypes of their gender were asked to answer the following questions truthfully; however, there was a twist with the two people chosen - both are heterosexual and very supportive allies to the LGBT community.

WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON SOCIETIES' VIEWS ON WHAT A MAN/WOMAN IS SUPPOSED TO BE AND DO YOU FEEL IT'S A BARRIER THAT HAS TO BE BROKEN DOWN?

"My thought on society's views on what a man is supposed to be is outdated because non stereotypical men are a lot more mainstream and accepted compared to before. I feel that this barrier should be taken down, however the current pace of society is slowly taking down the barrier on its own." -Jorge

"I don't necessarily see society's views as a barrier, because that would imply that women whose interests do line up with society's expectations are making the wrong choice. Instead, I think that people give too much importance to society's expectations; they compromise and give up on dreams because, "That's not something that boys/girls do." I believe that is the real barrier, the belief that being different is a bad thing." -Alison

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE A MAN/WOMAN ACCORDING TO SOCIETY?

"I would define a man according to society as someone who is extremely self sufficient and who does things on his own without help from others, such as doing repairs or traveling without asking for directions. He is also really masculine and is prideful of that masculinity." -Jorge

"Hollywood seems to feel that a woman must be pretty, have excellent fashion sense, perfect hair, nails and teeth. Women who are overweight or have assertive personalities are either the villain, or comic relief. Many religions, on the other hand, view women as inferior to men, even if they do not teach that explicitly. Women are praised for their abilities as homemakers, and are encouraged to find joy and happiness in taking care of their families. There aren't many religions out there that encourage women to seek out leadership roles, and many flat-out do not permit woman in said positions." -Alison

HOW DO YOU PERSONALLY BREAK THE STEREOTYPE? WHAT EXEMPTS YOU FROM BEING A STEREOTYPE MAN/WOMAN?

I break away from the stereotype on how I dress and act. For example I prefer dressing in colors such as pink and lavender as opposed to colors such as black and blue. I've also never been into sports and that sometimes makes me feel like it's hard for me to have other guy friends." -Jorge

"I do things because I want to do them, and I don't ever think about whether that thing is "girly" or not. My husband words it nicely. He says, 'You do what you want without stopping to think, 'Does this come in pink?'" -Alison

HOW WOULD YOU PERSONALY DEFINE A MAN/WOMAN?

"I would define a man as someone who identifies as such and because there isn't any one type of man, men can differ heavily." -Jorge

"In the most basic way, as how that particular individual identifies himself/herself. As far as I am concerned, if someone feels that they are a woman, that is good enough for me. Anything else, their looks, likes/dislikes, hobbies, sexual orientation or what they have going on between their legs is none of my business." -Alison

HAVE YOU EVER FELT OSTRACIZED FROM SOCIETY FOR NOT BEING A STEREOTYPE?

"Although I have never been fully ostracized or victimized for breaking away from the stereotype of a man, I do admit that those breakaways cause people to react differently to me compared to if I was a lot more of a stereotypical male. However these people mainly seem to be those who I do not know at all or those who I barely know." -Jorge

"I don't really feel that I have personally been victimized or ostracized for not being a stereotypical woman, fortunately. However, I have often noticed that when I do something in what is typically considered to be a man's field people tend to be disproportionately impressed and grateful. Now don't get me wrong, I will happily accept credit and praise when I fix something complicated. But it is a little condescending when I take care of something fairly basic and other people in the same field react as if it was a huge deal." -Alison

FINAL THOUGHTS

I thought for years that the reason I was different was because I had different likes that justified my sexuality only to find out that many people from the heterosexual community also face these same types of insecurities. When we let little things stop influencing how we treat others, we can achieve so much together. Consider this before you judge someone based on their interests. Is gender stereotyping an issue the LGBT community has to fight to knock down? Or is gender stereotyping an issue society in general must work together to eliminate?

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FESTIVAL ENTERTAINMENT

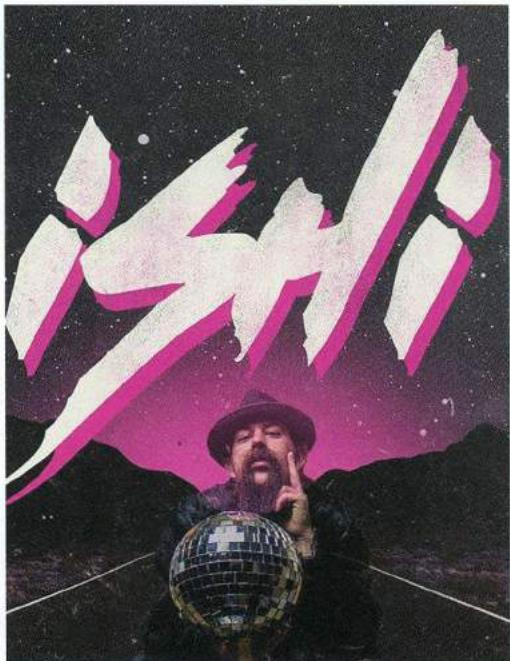
Pearl made the boys and girls swoon as a finalist on "RuPaul's Drag Race."

Since then, the performer has released an EDM album, "Pleasure," that charted on Billboard; toured the world; and recently signed with Wilhelmina Models. Pearl also walked the red carpet at the Cannes Film Festival for L'Oréal Paris.



PEARL

ISHI



Ishi is a high-energy electronic band that thrives on creating a positive atmosphere that encourages their audience to be themselves, let loose and, most importantly, dance! The band has won "Best Electronic Act" from the Dallas Observer for the last 5 out of 6 years. Ishi plans to release a new vinyl EP late summer.

WRESTLERS



Houston-based Wrestlers features a blend of pop, R&B and traditional club influences. The duo has performed at major festivals in the US and Canada, including Lollapalooza, Counterpoint, Hangout Fest, Fun Fun Fun Fest and more. Wrestlers is currently recording its debut EP, which will include breakout soul sensation Kam Franklin of The Suffers.

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Q&A

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ALLY GRAND MARSHAL



What does it mean to you to be Grand Marshal of the Houston Gay Pride 2016?

What an amazing honor! I am truly grateful and appreciative. I value my relationship with the LGBT community. To have been nominated alone was an honor, but to be voted for was surreal. I just appreciate the fact that the LGBT community views me as an Ally. That's the real value to me. Thank you for thinking me worthy of fighting alongside you and celebrating victories with you as well.

What was the first LGBT Pride event that you ever volunteered for?

I have been volunteering in the LGBT community for over 10 years. It's hard for me to differentiate one event as Pride, I have never volunteered for the actual PRIDE parade or activities.

Why do you think it's important for members of the LGBT community to volunteer and/or get active in their community?

How else does the community grow and thrive if not by concern and involvement of the people who make it up. Volunteering supports growth and strengthens the collective system. The collective system is there to provide support to others who may be in need. We are the ones that we are waiting for. Because if not us, then who? Who will be there to ensure that what we worked hard for remains and grows?

Where were you when the ruling of gay marriage being legalized was announced? How was that experience for you?

I remember being at home and watching the coverage on the news. When it was announced, I was elated! It was beautiful to watch the celebration, the tears and the pride of the community. Sometimes you get a win and you just have to savor the moment.

What is the biggest barrier you feel the LGBT community faces presently?

As an ally of the community, I can't speak for what issues should be prioritized. What I can encourage is the LGBT community's ongoing involvement with other groups who are fighting similar injustices and oppression. As we fight our own battles within our collective, we learn skills, tricks and trades along the way to victory. We should continue to share with one another and learn how to link arms and start winning on a grander, more impacting scale. It's one of the things that I like about the Pride Parade and its system... it allows for allies to join in the struggle and the celebration.

With all the progress that has been made in the past couple of years, why do you believe it is still important to celebrate Gay Pride?

Everyone has the right to celebrate what they believe is valuable to them. We can always celebrate progress especially if we continue to make it. The African American community has come a long way since slavery, but we won't miss a moment down here in Texas to celebrate and recognize the date of our collective emancipation. It's a moment of acknowledgement.

What was the biggest obstacle you had to overcome when you came out of the closet and what advice would you give to those too terrified to do so?

I can answer the second question, not the first. And I can only answer as a FRIEND. Coming out seems to be more of a process than a one-time outburst. Similar to disclosing one's HIV status. You don't just say it once, you have to repeat it over and over again... if you choose to live a life without secrets. No doubt, the process can be scary and even terrifying for some. But not everyone that you come out to will react the same way. Some will not care, others may. But at the end of the day, it's **YOU**. Your life! Your experience! Sometimes, telling or "disclosing" yourself to someone that is supportive can help build the system you will need to continue the process.

Who has or have been the biggest supporters in your life that have made you feel comfortable with who you are?

Funny, one of the reasons why this nomination is so important is because of my relationship with the community. When I was first diagnosed with HIV in 1991, it was the gay community that educated me and included me in the collective struggle of living and dying with HIV. It was this community that helped me learn how to "reset" my life to deal with HIV and not let HIV deal with me. For that support, I will always be grateful. And you know Leos... we are loyal!

Since the ruling of gay marriage being legalized in 2015, have you had the opportunity to attend a same sex wedding or have you yourself had the chance to have a same sex wedding?

Actually, I did. I attended the ceremony of a couple that had been together for over 10 years. They have three children together and all of them participated in the ceremony. It was perfect and wonderful. We had a chance to see old friends and witness the ongoing commitment of family under the full support of the United States Government.

What is your favorite thing about Houston's Gay Pride and why?

My favorite thing about Gay Pride is having the opportunity to gather with friends and family and celebrate their time and space. I love the parade at night.

Q&A

Who has or have been the biggest supporters in your life that have made you feel comfortable with who you are?

My wife, Kim, has been my biggest supporter. I love her so much and I'm very thankful for her. She is such a sweet, caring, compassionate person, and because of her, I am able to accomplish a lot. I am truly blessed to have her.

Since the ruling of gay marriage being legalized in 2015, have you had the opportunity to attend a same sex wedding or have you yourself had the chance to have a same sex wedding?

Kim and I were legally married in NYC a year before the ruling. However, I have had the pleasure of attending a few weddings, including our 2013 Male Grand Marshal's wedding, John Nechman.

What is something about yourself that you would like readers to know?

What makes you "you"?

My laugh! I LOVE to laugh! If you make me laugh, you have a friend for life.

Looking back on it now, how much did your life change after coming out?

I have not regretted it. I have had to overcome many obstacles in life that had nothing to do with my sexuality. Therefore, I do not regret coming out. I feel good knowing that my whole self is with me in every aspect of my life.

What is the biggest barrier you feel the LGBT community faces presently?

One of the largest issues faced is the lack of nondiscrimination policies in place. Yes, people can get married. However, if they get married on Friday, people can be fired on Monday for being LGBT. That was the point of HERO — to have a local measure in place if people were fired from their job for being LGBT or evicted from their apartment. Additionally, the transexual community is under attack and this has to stop!

What does it mean to you to be Grand Marshal of the Houston Gay Pride 2016?

It means so much to me that this beautiful, diverse, amazing Houston community chose me to represent them during Houston PRIDE Week. I have lived here all my life and have been going to the parade since 1997. As I look back at the road traveled to get to the moment when my name was announced, I am overwhelmed with emotion. Had someone told me this could happen, I would have never believed it. Wow! Plus, there were two amazing, hardworking, equality-focused finalists, Melissa Vivanco and Rev. Lynette Ross, so I know it was not an easy choice. Thank you Houston!

What was the first LGBT Pride event that you ever volunteered for?

I started participating in PRIDE in 2006 when my wife, Kim, and I started attending Community Gospel Church. The church did a lot of outreach during PRIDE. Every year the church would have a booth at the festival and a float in the parade. I was inspired to volunteer because I saw the opportunity to make a difference. A lot of LGBT people had been hurt by the church and if there was an opportunity to help mend that hurt, I wanted to be there. It was a great experience. PRIDE is the one time where people get to come out and have a **HUGE** party that celebrates difference... beautiful difference! I've met so many people, people with whom I am still friends.

Why do you think it's important for members of the LGBT community to volunteer and/or get active in their community?

It's important because this work is tough and it takes many hands. Nearly 50 years after Stonewall, we have seen much progress. Marriage equality is the law of the land. President Obama is the strongest pro-equality President this nation has seen, and we are seeing more LGBT issues illuminated. However, we know there is so much more to be done.

FRAN
WATSON

FEMALE GRAND MAR-

Our community still has many struggles because we have not reached full equality. That was evident with the defeat of the Houston Equal Rights Ordinance (HERO) in 2015, as well as the anti-Trans legislation being introduced in southern states. Additionally, until HIV is combated in communities of color, nondiscrimination laws are enacted, and LGBT youth homelessness is eradicated, there is still work to do.

What is your favorite thing about Houston's Gay Pride and why?

The joy that permeates the week. It's an oasis of LGBTQIA folks and allies celebrating the community. We get to see friends and rainbows and all things. All things LGBTQ. And the tutus!

With all the progress that has been made in the past couple of years, why do you believe it is still important to celebrate Gay Pride?

Why not? We should always celebrate, because we should always be proud of who we are!

What was the biggest obstacle you had to overcome when you came out of the closet and what advice would you give to those too terrified to do so?

Being out everywhere. I was not really out at work, which made it difficult to develop meaningful relationships. I was always scared people would ask about my family and then there would be issues. Once I made the decision to be myself fully, I didn't turn back. Everyone's journey is different. I've had to hear some negative comments, and I've lost friends, but I tell you, it's much better than before being able to bring my whole self to the table. Thankfully, I have a loving support network.



Tori Jade Photography

Q&A

BRADLEY ODOM-HARRIS

MALE GRAND MAR-



What does it mean to you to be Grand Marshal of the Houston Gay Pride 2016?

It is such an honor to be recognized for my commitment to serve and support Houston's amazing GLBT organizations over the last 17 years. This opportunity to help lead off Pride Houston's 2016 celebration and parade takes me full circle to 1996 when I walked out on to Westheimer and Montrose at my very first Pride. I always think of that day as June arrives in that this year will be someone else's first Pride. For that, we all need to pitch in and make sure it is the most positive and amazing experience for everyone that attends.

What was the first LGBT Pride event that you ever volunteered for?

My first volunteer activity around Pride was in the late 1990's volunteering with the Human Rights Campaign. I became connected to Pride Houston in 1999 with sponsoring and recruiting friends to join Friends of Pride. Having that relationship led to me joining the Board of Pride in the fall of 2005 and then eventually becoming President of the organization. So, clearly these experiences were positive.

Why do you think it's important for members of the LGBT community to volunteer and/or get active in their community?

It is important to support your community wherever you live. Being a participant in the community brings great people into your life, opens amazing opportunities, and helps you be part of a greater purpose. Your talents are needed.

Where were you when the ruling of gay marriage being legalized was announced? How was that experience for you?

I was traveling to Florida for a family vacation. I was definitely happy and very jealous seeing the Pride celebrations around the nation on Facebook and TV. I am happy that I will be in Houston this year to celebrate Pride.

What is the biggest barrier you feel the LGBT community faces presently?

I fully believe that we need to pass the Equality Act to ensure federal protections against discrimination. I got married in 2011 and it is now recognized in Texas, but I can still be fired in Texas for being gay. Recent laws enacted such as HB2 in North Carolina make it not just unsafe for transgender people, but for all people. It allows security and police to harass people trying to use the appropriate bathroom. There have been reports of many cis-gender women being arrested or kicked out of bathrooms. So it is not just about transgender rights, it is everyone. Next year, the Texas legislature will be back in session and you can guarantee there will be new laws presented trying to strip the rights of GLBT citizens.

What is your favorite thing about Houston's Gay Pride and why?

Pride Houston brings us together to celebrate our community. There is so much joy and love for everyone at the Festival and Parade. My favorite part of Pride Houston is that energy and excitement that reminds us that Houston is really a great city and we are an amazing community.

With all the progress that has been made in the past couple of years, why do you believe it is still important to celebrate Gay Pride?

It is important to celebrate that progress and ensure those working to limit our rights know we are a visible and active community. I also feel coming together provides a great way to highlight the great organizations that make up our community.

What was the biggest obstacle you had to overcome when you came out of the closet and what advice would you give to those too terrified to do so?

I think fear of rejection is always the biggest obstacle of coming out. That is why Pride Houston provides comfort and strength in knowing we are all great people. I think making sure you have a good network around you to support you through coming out is key. I also think that coming out in stages helped me. I first came out to friends, then family, and last work.

Who has or have been the biggest supporters in your life and that have made you feel comfortable with who you are?

John Walzell was an amazing positive influence in my life and the Houston community in the late 1990's and early 2000's. He is who instilled in me the deep understanding and near duty of giving back to the community. When we lost him, Houston lost a treasure. If I could talk to him today, I would thank him for his guidance, his friendship, and his leadership.

Since the ruling of gay marriage being legalized in 2015, have you had the opportunity to attend a same sex wedding or have you yourself had the chance to have a same sex wedding?

David and I were married in New York City on November 11, 2011. It was definitely the happiest day of my life and an amazing experience that I was able to share with my family. Soon after getting married, we spent the legal fees changing our name and drawing up the paperwork to have some of the rights and protections of married people in Texas. With the 2015 decision, we gained the remaining protections we could have been denied or were denied by not being legally recognized in Texas. I am happy that my marriage is finally recognized in Texas and that other people can get married in this great state.

What is something about yourself that you would like readers to know? What makes you "you"?

I think one thing that is core to me is that I am truly interested in other people. I love meeting people and learning about their lives. I think that is why I am so passionate about our rights, because I have been able to meet some amazing people that are being denied rights or find it difficult to live their authentic self.

Looking back on it now, how much did your life change after coming out?

I am definitely a happier and more comfortable person because of living my authentic self. I have had so many great opportunities through being myself and giving back to the community. Some years have definitely been better than others, but I have never regretted sharing who I am.



More Rights for LGBT Parents?

By Laura C.

A spate of gay custody battles are forcing the law to reconsider what constitutes a parent, with one particular case in New York set to have major implications for many more LGBTI couples. The New York Court of Appeals is to decide whether the ex-girlfriend of a child's biological mother should have legal parenting rights – despite having never adopted the child in question, or been married to the biological mother.

Brooke Barone claims she acted as the child's 'Mamma B' when her girlfriend Elizabeth Cleland gave birth after artificial insemination. But when the couple split up, Cleland reportedly denied Barone visitation rights to the child – which is what Barone is now fighting for in court. Cleland claims she does not feel safe leaving her child with Barone.

Tangled custody battles of same-sex families The argument against awarding parental rights outside of biology, marriage or adoption centers on the potential for opening up bogus parenting claims. These, lawmakers argue, could come from friends, nannies, or even abusive partners seeking to gain control and cause distress.

However, those in favor of broadening the definition of a parent point out heterosexual men have been recognized as parents without genetic or adoptive connections, in order to compel child support payments.

The legalization of same-sex marriage in the US has thrust the tangled legalities of same-sex families into the spotlight, with several similar cases currently being fought in other US states, including another typically gay-friendly state, Massachusetts. And in Canada, the premier of Ontario has pledged to change the law so that both parents in an LGBTI

couple are immediately entered onto the birth certificate. This is a huge change to the province's current law, where a non-biological parent in a same-sex couple is forced to begin the lengthy and costly adoption process in order to be legally recognized.

Speaking to The Wall Street Journal, Columbia Law professor Suzanne Goldberg said that 'It's only an accident of law that leads one of those parents to be unrecognized [in these cases].'

New York decision to set precedent

Even when a partner has adopted the child, however, a biological parent looking to disavow their former partner of parentage has legal recourse – as a recent case involving a lesbian couple in Alabama showed. The Alabama courts were eventually obliged by the US Supreme Court to find in favor of the adoptive parent, however.

For many LGBTI couples, the legality of parentage is a pressing issue. With same-sex marriage only legalized in the US last year, and adoption an incredibly expensive process, a number of non-biological gay parents do not immediately qualify as a recognized parent in the eyes of the law. These people would find themselves in a legal quagmire should their relationship dissolve – or even if the biological parent in the couple dies.

All eyes are on the New York Court of Appeals decision, then. Barone will be holding her breath.

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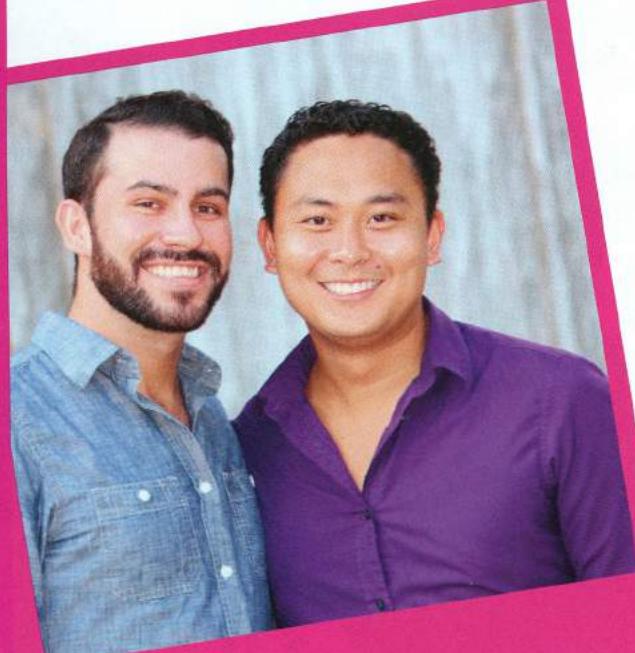




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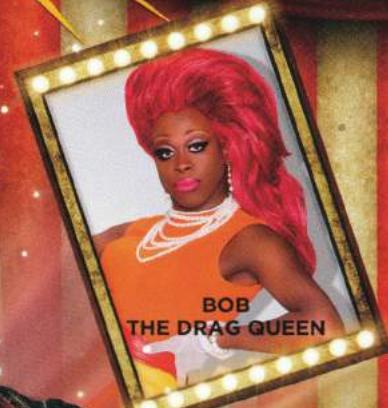
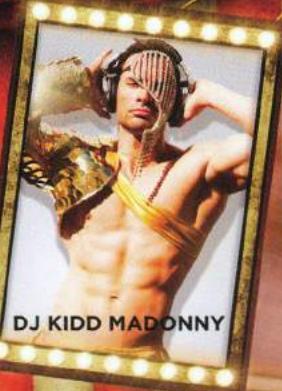
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