

HEALTH

My Son Wears Dresses; Get Over It

A lot of marriages don't survive raising a gender-creative son who is, statistically speaking, most likely going to be gay or transgender as an adult. I wish I could talk to those men. I wish I could be there for their kids.

By Matt Duron

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SHARE & GIFT REMOVE



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I've been a police officer for more than 15 years. I've been a detective and now I'm a senior officer who trains the new recruits out on the street. Before that I was a firefighter. Before that I played football in college after playing baseball and football in high school, and lettering my sophomore year. I like beer, classic trucks, punk music, riding my motorcycle and catching the game with my buddies. I'm a stereotypical "guy's guy" and hyper-masculine to a lot of people, I guess. Which may be why it surprises them when they find out that my son wears dresses. And heels, and makeup. It surprises them even more when they learn that I'm cool with it. And at this point, I wouldn't want him to change. Because, if my son liked boy stuff and dressed like a boy, he wouldn't be my boy, he'd be like a stranger.

I grew up in a sports-oriented family. My father was a high school football and baseball coach and my mother was a professional surfer. I had one brother. Growing up, I don't remember homosexuality or gender being discussed in my house. No negative talk. No positive talk. No talk about it at all. My brother and I are straight. It appeared that all of my extended family and my parents' friends were straight. I thought that that's how it went. Then, at 18, I met my future wife and she introduced me to her brother. He was the first openly gay person I had ever met. He was cool, and who he chose to love or get physical with was none of my concern. That didn't matter to me. All that mattered was that I thought his sister was hot. I focused on that.

To me, loving a child who is different, a target and seen as vulnerable is my role as a father and decent human being.

But, being an athlete, a firefighter, and a cop, I have spent a lot of time in locker rooms and around guys who dish out homophobic slurs like turkey on Thanksgiving. Faggot. Queer. Gay. Homo. Cocksucker. I started to notice the slurs more after I met my future brother-in-law. Then, I had a son who—as he describes himself—only likes girl stuff and wants to be treated like a girl, and those insults started to get under my skin in a new way.

Sometimes I'll call people out when they use them.

"Bro, I was just joking. You know I was kidding. What's your problem?"

Those are the responses I get.

Here's the thing. When you use those words as a way to degrade or get the upper hand on someone, you are implying that to be a man who is gay or effeminate is to be "lesser than." Now, when I hear those words, I feel like you are calling my son and people like him "lesser than." I won't stand for that. Get a dictionary. Learn some new words.

I don't tell most of the guys who I work with at the police department about my son. It's none of their business and I don't trust them with the information. I don't trust what they might think or say behind my back when they should just say it to my face. I don't trust them with a kid as kick-ass and special as mine.

My close friends know. And I know that they are my close friends because they don't give a shit. They don't care what toys my son likes or how he chooses to dress. They just care that he is happy and healthy and that I'm being a good dad.

I've slipped at times and told some of the other guys in my life.

"Man, how do you deal with that? I couldn't do it. Not in my house," they've said.

What does all of that mean? You couldn't parent a kid like mine? You'd be his first bully and "make him a man?" To me, that makes you less of a man. Much of the time when I confront such people they immediately begin to backpedal and try to move on. I'm not afraid of this discussion and many don't choose to argue with me or defend their position.

To me, loving a child who is different, a target and seen as vulnerable is my role as a father and decent human being. He's just as special to me and loved by me as my oldest son, whose most prized possession is a pocketknife, who plays football, likes fart jokes, and is starting to notice girls.

I want to love him, not change him.

I'm a father. I signed on for the job with no strings attached, no caveats, no conditions. I can name every Disney Princess and her movie of origin. I've painted my son's nails and rushed to remove it when he was afraid that he would get teased for wearing it. I didn't want to remove it, I wanted to follow him around and stare down anybody who even thought about teasing him. I only removed it because he started to have a panic attack. It was his decision and if he wants to edit himself to feel safer, I'll do it. Every time. No questions asked.

My wife started a blog about raising our son who is a girl at heart. At first, I didn't really think anybody would read it. They did, and she started to get emails from parents who are raising a son like ours. My wife calls C.J. "gender creative." Most people choose the more negative connotation and call him gender non-conforming or gender dysphoric.

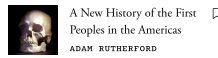
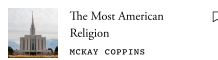
Some of the emails she gets come from dads who are struggling. I feel bad for every single one of them. I've been there. I've struggled. A lot. But I've also evolved. A lot.

She's gotten emails from more moms than I can count who are now raising an effeminate boy alone because the dad couldn't deal. It pisses me off, but I know that it's the reality. A lot of marriages don't survive raising a gender-creative son who is, statistically speaking, most likely going to be gay or transgender as an adult. I wish I could talk to those men. I wish I could be there for their kids.

My wife also gets a load of emails from people asking where our son's father is, as though I couldn't possibly be around and still allow a male son to display female behavior. To those people I say, I'm right here fathering my son. I want to love him, not change him. My son skipping and twirling in a dress isn't a sign that a strong male figure is missing from his life, to me it's a sign that a strong male figure is fully vested in his life and committed to protecting him and allowing him to grow into the person who he was created to be.











I may be a "guy's guy," but that doesn't mean that my son has to be.

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Matt Duron is a veteran police officer based in Orange County, California. His wife, Lori Duron, is the author of the memoir *Raising My Rainbow* and the creator of the [blog it is based on](#).

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