



## **Put your politics where your kink is**

by Sossity Chiricuzio, PQ Monthly

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Connor Braddock, also known as Mr. Oregon State Leather 2017, is out about many things: his love for kink and contracts, his joy in human puppy play, his penchant for being a shameless switch, and his commitment to social justice. Of all these things, it's actually the last one that convinced him to run for a leather title. The title comes with a platform, and a responsibility: to make a positive impact on local communities, and beyond.

He is planning on the usual things: a trip to the Folsom Street Fair and various leather contests, the admiration of bearded bears and boy pups with enough mischief to make their training fun, the satisfying creak of well loved leather being, well, loved. All through these adventures, however, he plans to weave a net to help lift up and support those who are often overlooked and let down by traditional leather communities: people of color, femmes, trans folks, and that wide range of us who

don't fit the standards of aesthetics, be it because of our bodies, or our budgets.

This is not to say that the leather community hasn't debated, dialogued, and problem solved around these issues, however, they are still present in the kink communities, just as they are in our queer and trans communities. Like the larger culture we exist inside of, we've absorbed those lessons of patriarchy and white supremacy, and continue to enact them upon each other.

I spoke to Connor about these issues, and his answers leave me looking forward to seeing what he makes of his title year.

**PQ:** *What do you think the biggest issues facing the leather community are right now, and how do you plan to address those?*

**CB:** I think the biggest issues facing the leather community right now are racism, and femme/transphobia . White, cis, gay men are still the dominant demographic in positions of leadership and visibility in the leather community, and toxic masculinity rears its head often. There have been great shifts in local communities, and some national events, but at most contests and conventions in the country that's who you'll see the most producing events and judging-- and we are working to change that!

My leather community is full of people who understand the intersectionality between how we play and how we walk through the world. Addressing racism starts with individual white people doing the work to not just listen to people of color, *but to actively give up power and redistribute it*. The same goes for femme/transphobia: As a white, masculine person walking through the world, it is my responsibility to not just be aware of the space I take up, and whose voices are being heard, but to make space for others both physically and otherwise.

**PQ:** *"Toxic masculinity" has come up a few times in this conversation—can you talk more about that, and what you see your role as a masculine person is in combating that?*

**CB:** As a masculine identified person in this world it's my job everyday to push back against the toxic masculinity behaviors I see and experience-- these include disrespect and devaluing of women and femmes, their labor and contributions, an inability to express a full range of emotions, and entitlement. All of these things do more harm than I could share here, but I believe that healthy masculinity exists, and that it will be a process to find and emulate those good attributes throughout my life. As someone who's got a platform that makes me highly visible this also means being very aware of actively walking my talk.

***PQ:** Several blatant situations of racism occurred recently at the International Leather Sir/Leather boy event in Dallas, Texas. How is that being handled in the community, particularly by white kink folks?*

**CB:** While not physically present at this even, I did watch the video after the fact and was astounded that the scene (a fantasy scene set on a plantation with music from *Deliverance* that was described as a “comical raceplay”) not only played out without interruption on the stage at an international contest, but had ALSO been done on the stage at the regional feeder contest. As a white person, I was deeply uncomfortable. I cannot imagine how horrible it felt for the BIPOC folks in the audience. I believe that racism is never funny, or appropriate for the stage of a contest. We must be aware of the times we live in, and the very real danger black people especially face, and to degrade that struggle is to add insult to historical and CURRENT injury.

As far as how it's being “handled”, a group of people, including ones who were in attendance, have gotten together to respond formally to the producers. I see my role as providing support to the BIPOC folks who are fighting this in our community, and having hard conversations about white supremacy and how we can be effective accomplices in the fight for justice in our community.

***PQ:** Do you feel the reception of female and femme people in gay leather spaces has improved in the last decade?*

**CB:** That is not an experience I can speak to personally, since I came into the community after I transitioned, but I know that female/femme people have had struggles to be seen and accepted by their gay male/masculine counterparts. I am happy to see long standing women's clubs, play spaces, and more and more contests. I have been involved with Drummer North America for three years now--an international men's leather contest held in Las Vegas every year--and next year they are debuting a women's contest for all self identified women with huge support from the men's contest community. It's been awesome to see!

***PQ:** As a trans man who is primarily attracted to gay men, what has your experience been in the leather community, and what would you like to see change?*

**CB:** I was brought into the leather community by other transmen and feel blessed that I continue to meet men who are very involved, well respected, hard players with a love for leather and tradition. My experience has largely been a good one, I have been accepted and welcomed into the men's communities that I have found myself in. What I'd like to see change is the knowledge around play between cis and transmen. Being wikipedia to a new date is exhausting, cis dudes. I know and understand how your body works, please do the same for me.

***PQ:** What advice do you have for people that are interested in getting involved in the leather scene?*

**CB:** I'd say consider first what you are looking for. Community? Play? Partners? Volunteer opportunities? Maybe you're looking for a little of all of those? A good start is to look up a local play party, club, or event. I find the best way to get involved is to volunteer! There's lots of friendly faces, looking to welcome new people. Hell, come find me at an event, I'll be happy to say hello.

**Sossity Chiricuzio is a writer and columnist based out of Portland, Oregon. She is a regular contributor for PQ Monthly and focuses on social justice, communication, community, and changing the world. You can follow her adventures online @sossitywrites and find more at [sossitywrites.com](http://sossitywrites.com).**