

THE GAY COMMUNICATION GAME

LIFE STORIES & LESSONS FOR GAY MEN

A BOOK PROPOSAL

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OPENING QUOTES:

"I'm a gay man, but I don't like to associate myself with the gay community, simply because I can't stand the way they treat one another! (Leonard Lewis - NYC, 2003).

"I don't like women and ugly men!" (A quote from a tragic hustler in the movie Circuit)

"I see no difference between the viciousness in which some queens* verbally attack one another and the behavior of homophobes** who are the first ones to yell "FAG" to their so-called "straight" friends, whenever they see a gay man on a city sidewalk. (Rick Barton-Dallas, Texas & Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2001).

ALL MEN ARE BEASTS! So, just imagine TWO BEASTS getting together? NO WONDER YOU FELLAS HAVE A PROBLEM WITH COMMUNICATION!
(Cassandra Danz – NYC: a wife, mother, and professional comedienne, 2001).

*Queens - Not to be confused with the ruler of a country, although, some of them would like to believe they possess that kind of power.

**Homophobes - These people are mostly shameful men who can't deal with their homosexual urges and are notorious for physically attacking gay men when in packs.

The Gay Communication Game

I. INTRODUCTION

MY OWN STORY AND PERSONAL CONNECTION TO THIS GAME

Having moved to a rural part of Connecticut in the beginning months of the nineties, I fully expected big changes to happen. With my then-boyfriend in tow, I left a one-bedroom apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan to move into a picturesque stone house with three bedrooms and two acres of land. Images of a more settled "married life" in this bucolic community of manicured lawns and quiet dinners with friends came to my mind.

Unfortunately, my "married life" ended up lasting less than a year. My boyfriend and I were totally unable to communicate. He was always expressing a fervent desire to leave. According to him, it was, "ALL MY FAULT that the relationship was not working out!" He soon acted upon his desire, and the Christmas holidays came and went where I was left alone in my "home sweet home", with four dogs, not knowing a single soul in the area. That was until I found a local gay travel agent from the Damron Guide, who soon introduced me to other gay men and women in the community. I was saved, or so I thought!

In time, I became aware of the difficulties in being gay and living in Connecticut. I no longer had the large gay community of New York City to draw upon. I often found myself feeling alone and isolated in an area where the gay community is very much in the minority and all too spread out. And yet, when I went to parties and functions where gay men were plentiful, I noticed an interesting dynamic of non-communication or selective communication occurring.

Most puzzling to me was my observation of attractive men in cliques talking negatively about other men around them to whom they were clearly attracted, yet resisting the urge to introduce themselves and express their true interest. I found it increasingly intriguing on subsequent parties that I attended, to observe more men not taking the initiative to introduce themselves to attractive and available men, choosing rather to comment critically about them to their small gathering of friends. Sadly, expecting to experience the geniality of my new suburban surroundings with a close grouping of gay neighbors to enjoy, I instead found bitchiness and meanness abounding on a par with the intense "cruise bars" of New York City where few men work up the courage to talk to one another and often go home alone and frustrated.

This type of hyper selective communication immediately brought up painful childhood memories where I was either the object of other children's comments or purposefully ignored them in order to avoid their barbs. At an early age I knew that I was different from most of the other boys and girls in school. I

tended to either keep to myself or act up like the "class clown" to get approval. My parents and my brother perceived my behavior as less than "man-like," more like a "sissy." At age twelve, I was sent to a military school in Miami, Florida to "make more of a man out of me!" I lasted all of two months! Needless to say, my parents were very disappointed but I was never the same.

Although our family dynamics have drastically changed over the years, at that time, I felt alone in the world. I often felt the need to appease my family by either avoiding them or placating their needs. The thought of "acting up" like a spoiled child, is something I would rarely do. Instead, I often felt like a little, fat boy with a smiling mask, or facade. I would often cry and say "I'm sorry," for no good reason. As an adult, I realized that I allowed myself to become an easy victim for abusive boyfriends, because for some inane reason, I felt I deserved the abuse. But in time I discovered my refuge in the theatre where I found others just like me.

My own history and my expertise as a teacher of communication, has led me to write this book as a direct response to my life experience. In addition, my years as a certified therapist have provided me with the ability to analyze human behavior when examining the communication of gay men in social settings. That analysis will be infused throughout the "Life Stories" chapters in commentary which covers seminal events in each interviewee's life. Analysis will focus on a subject's comments or actions which pointedly relate to gay communication, self assessment, and judgments of the interviewee expressed by other gay men.

MY PURPOSE FOR WRITING THIS BOOK

I propose that by interviewing both gay and heterosexual men and women concerning gay male communication, those interviews will yield many interesting anecdotes, as well as: unexpected comparisons; and identifiable observations and insights. By investigating some of the roots of these often demeaning and devaluing communication patterns, perhaps we may find a way to promote a more positive change. Awareness that a problem **does exist** is the first step toward changing one's own behavior.

I want to make it perfectly clear that I am not suggesting that every gay man interacts in a dysfunctional manner when communicating with other gay men. However, there is a large enough number of us for whom I believe this book IS important. Important, for primarily providing a tool for obtaining more awareness as to how we speak and interact with other gay men. I also want it to be known that I do not perceive being gay as a shameful experience, but rather as a prideful one. It's interesting, that as gay men, we are continuously demanding more respect from the heterosexual world. But why should the heterosexual world show more respect for us when, frequently, we don't respect one another? I am writing this book because as a gay man I often find myself engaging in this disrespectful "Game" and I am not alone. There are too many of us acting badly toward ourselves and one another. It is my goal to explore the origins of this behavior and to discover ways to avoid it. Only then can we open ourselves up to more meaningful interactions and partake in the full range of the human experience. Learning to embrace one another for the imperfect human beings we are is a starting point.

WHY IS IT CALLED A GAME?

"It's called a game, because if you get the boy - you win!" (Barton, 2001)

In order to understand why the communication patterns between gay men can be viewed as a game, it is important to know just what the definition of a game is. The dictionary reads as follows:

"Game - (noun) diversion, pastime; jest; contest for amusement; scheme, strategy; animals or birds hunted, (adjective) brave, willing, (verb) gamble. (Collins, 1987)

The above definitions can easily be associated with the "game" that frequently occurs between gay men in their social interactions. "Animals or birds hunted" brings to my mind the popular term of "being on the hunt" for potential sex partners, as in the sport of gay "cruising", where we can be (either or both) hunter and prey.

The "game" itself can often be an unconscious one for the initiator. There isn't always a conscious desire on the part of the initiator to play a "game" with another individual, neither is it the conscious objective of the initiator to "win" the "game". As a gay man, I have frequently experienced this "game" both as an observer and a participant and my principal concern with this "game playing," is that it can often injure the self esteem of the "players". We seem to default to playing the "game" because it is not an easy feat to approach and communicate with someone to whom we are attracted.

To elaborate this point further, here are some stories in which many gay men often find themselves in their desire to communicate, and the obstacles that prevent them from truly accomplishing their goal. This type of "self-talk" or "inner-monologue" can occur in a gym, a bar or club, a party, or any social gathering where the objective is to meet and greet other gay men to include in one's "ever-changing" social circle.

REJECTION OR ACCEPTANCE

Walking into his best friend Carlos's annual Christmas party, Anthony observes several very attractive men interacting with one another. Immediately his inner dialogue goes into overdrive and he hears familiar questions that have not always served him well, but he doesn't know how to shut them off: "I don't know who to talk to?" "Who do I **want** to talk to?" "I'm really attracted to that guy over there on the sofa but can I summon up the courage to approach him?" "I know I'm attractive, but if he rejects me, I'll die of embarrassment in the middle of this party!"

Fortunately for Anthony, Carlos performs his host duties efficiently and soon takes Anthony by the hand and introduces him to the man on the sofa. Within a short period of time, the two men find many common interests and are increasingly attracted to one another. By the time the party comes to an end, the two are a couple making plans for the rest of the evening and future dates.

SEXUAL OR PURELY FRIENDLY

Craig is in the middle of his workout and notices for the hundredth time the man of his dreams working out on the bench next to his. His thoughts begin to race as he nonchalantly glances over to his idol's direction as the man pumps the barbells with clear determination. As soon as the man finishes his set, Craig considers "making his move" but, those cautionary voices soon become louder: "I want to meet him, but I'm afraid to approach him, what if he snubs me!" "Will he only perceive my message as a sexual gesture and not an opportunity to get to know one another?" "Will we have anything in common once we start talking? I just don't know if I'm his type?"

As it turns out, the man of his dreams has just completed his set and is soon asking Craig if he has finished with the barbells that he is using? With a newfound courage, Craig jokes to the man about the intensity of his workout and how he admires his determination. The man smiles widely and introduces himself as "John", in turn, complimenting Craig on his own workout routine. As the men converse, Craig admits his previous hesitation to converse with John and to Craig's amazement, John also admits that he has often noticed Craig on the gym floor but was unsure himself about engaging Craig in conversation. After a much-relieved laugh, the two men decide to continue their workouts and make plans to go out to lunch after the gym.

PLEASE DON'T INVADE MY SPACE!

Story #1 - James is someone that tends to command considerable attention from men with his good looks and impressive physique. When he works out in the gym, he does not want to talk to anyone unless it is to ask them if they're finished with their routine so, he can quickly work in and complete his sets. Often while working out, he notices men looking in his direction or working out in close proximity to him which he hates. His thought process goes as follows: "I want that guy to stay away from me so, I'll ignore him and maybe he'll go away?" "Will you please leave me alone; can't you see I'm busy working out?" "The people in this gym are just too annoying, I wish I could afford to change gyms but unfortunately I can't. What am I to do?" But, instead of voicing his angry thoughts, James continues his workout with his usual grim facial expressions and resolve.

Story #2 - Eric loves the beach and the group of beautiful and popular friends he has acquired through much trial and error. Eric and his clique rarely go out in public without being in their own company. With the comfort and support of his inner circle, Eric will often feel empowered to share his thoughts with his friends about other gay men knowing full well they will agree with him. At a chic house party at the beach Eric freely stated to his friends the following about some of the men at the party: "I am really mad at that guy so I'll just avoid looking in his direction and hopefully he'll get the hint and move on." "Even though he's a nice guy, he just doesn't fit into our group. Maybe if he lost some more weight we could invite him in?"

- With how many of the statements from all the stories listed above would you tend to relate and identify?
- Ask yourself what occurs in your body whenever you are experiencing those situations in your life? Does your body tense up in any way or, do you feel the opposite, relaxed and confident?
- Do you feel that you suffer in any way when you can't be honest and upfront with someone who may just want to converse and interact with you? Are you concerned that if you say hello to them, are you in a sense, inviting them to your bed?

- Is it too difficult to reject someone who is attracted to you so instead, you simply ignore them?
- Are you too afraid of doing something that may be deemed 'uncool' so you do nothing instead?
- Finally, do you find gay men gathering in cliques for the purpose of safety and security eventually ending up looking and acting like one another? An image of the "clone look" of the seventies comes to mind where everyone sported trimmed mustaches and flannel shirts. This group dynamic of displaying a similar appearance and behavior is clearly parallel to teenage behavior. Do you agree or not?

Now, I'm not saying that this "game" doesn't also occur in the heterosexual world. The "straight" bar scene is well known for first encounters based primarily on physical attraction, but this book is primarily an exploration of the communication patterns occurring between gay men in various social interactions. I will, of necessity, include comparisons to heterosexual communication and dating rituals in various parts of this book in order to promote clarity and identification for the reader.

The following quote with regards to the game dynamic, describes the "pragmatic model of communication" elaborated upon by Sarah Trenholm in her book, Thinking through Communication, which focuses on patterns in our behavior where the objective is to feel a sense of winning in our interactions with others. The principal focus of this model is upon our actions when we meet and interact, and how similar those actions are to the 'moves' people make in playing a game such as chess.

In the pragmatic model, communication is seen as a game of sequential, interlocking moves between independent partners. Each player responds to the partner's moves in light of his own strategy in an anticipation of future actions. Some moves are specific to this game, and others are common gambits and strategies. Moves make sense only in context of the game. (Trenholm, 1995)

Trenholm explains further that the game most resembles a game of chess, because it is a game of strategy and skill. Through this analogy, it is my conviction that those who excel in playing the "game" may feel a sense of control in their lives simply because they hold onto the belief that they have the ability to "out-think" their opponents or partners. Perhaps by learning certain "tricks" in achieving one's objectives through game playing, the attainment of certain goals may be more easily reached, but at what price? Does the game of Life or Monopoly ever consider the human aspect of hurting others through one's quest for self esteem and personal gain?

The following is a personal narrative to further illustrate a particular type of communication game that often occurs between gay men. I hope the following story will provide several familiar experiences not only for gay men, but for everyone. Additionally, it was this specific experience that propelled me to write this book.

“WHEN TWO SOCIAL WORLDS COLLIDE”

SETTINGS: A popular gym in New York City and a restaurant in East Hampton.

On the large workout floor, I love the social interaction with my "gym buddies." The camaraderie helps to add some welcome respite during my workouts.

There is one especially attractive and personable man named Tom whom I love chatting with. The frequent topic of those talks concerned Tom's frustrations with his boyfriend Paul. I have noticed his boyfriend. Paul is young, handsome, and intelligent but, smiles infrequently. I suggested to Tom that he be honest with his feelings toward his boyfriend and tell Paul what upsets him with his behavior. In subsequent interactions with both men, I noticed that Paul smiles more and Tom says that he is more satisfied with their relationship. In the following weeks, Tom and I continue to chat and gossip and we both appear to enjoy the playfulness with one another in the gym.

Now outside the gym, I see Tom and Paul in various gay "circuit" parties to which Tom has clearly told me that he does not care to participate. My new lover and I met Tom and Paul at an East Hampton political fundraiser. Both men were cordial, but neither attempted to include either me or my lover in their group's conversation. There were more than seven people with them at the time, so I overlooked the slight.

That same evening, my lover and I were looking for a good restaurant in town. We found this charming restaurant and were soon escorted to our table by the hostess. Almost immediately, I noticed Tom and Paul and greeted them with their names commenting, "Wow, what a small world!" Tom simply smiled tightly and nodded his head; Paul did the same. They provided no opportunity to say more or allow me the opportunity to introduce my new lover. There was a third gentleman at their table who looked up, yet said nothing. The hostess seated us at a table near the threesome, but neither Tom nor Paul turned to say anything more to us. My lover and I ate our entire meal without either Tom or Paul saying a word to us, choosing only to speak to their dinner companion. The three of them finished their meal and left the restaurant without even saying goodbye. In fact, Tom forgot something at the table and had to come back to retrieve it. Again, he did not say goodbye, nor even acknowledge us with a nod or a smile.

I was enraged, but my boyfriend was clear in his desire NOT to meet either of them, and suggested that I ignore them when next I came in contact with the pair. He said, "they are not worthy of your friendship because of their stupid behavior." Yet, I continued to try to rationalize their actions by making excuses for them; that despite the third person appearing to be gay; perhaps the situation was too uncomfortable to make introductions. My boyfriend continued to argue his point. "They still could have greeted us more warmly or simply introduced us to their friend, and then continued their dinner conversation. By not greeting us, they were communicating something shameful about acknowledging us." I eventually agreed with my lover's more logical points and decided not to dwell on the clear snub and enjoy my boyfriend's attention. But, in secret, I couldn't wait to confront Tom at the gym or snub him in return.

As the reader you would probably ask yourself the following questions with regards to my story and the communication dynamics that transpired between all the parties involved such as: "What would prompt Tom and Paul to treat Vince and his lover like that? Why did Vince get so hurt by Tom and Paul's actions? Why was Vince's lover so angry and was he justified to be? When have I observed similar situations occurring to others, including my friends? Has this type of dismissive communication ever happened to me? How often have I been dismissive of someone else? Why do I fear rejection? Why do we so often anticipate being rejected?"

For several months Tom and I did not exchange a word to one another at the gym. Initially following that weekend, Tom attempted to be his playful self with me at the gym, but I quickly ignored him and walked away. Tom was visibly shocked by my rebuff as if he had suffered a body blow or had walked into an invisible force field. By ignoring Tom, wasn't I copying the same dismissive behavior as his? I had expressed to friends my desire to re-establish communication with Tom, but for those months, I didn't know if it was worth my effort to bother. What do you think? How would you have acted in a similar situation?

The above-mentioned case is just one example of the type of behavior that started me thinking. I knew that all this disrespect was not an isolated incident in our culture. Gay men, in groups, frequently behave in selective, hurtful, and "gossipy" ways similar to teenagers in cliques. So let's ask ourselves, "Why do so many in our gay community display such disrespectful manners toward one another?" That type of behavior only serves to demean us as individuals, and detract from our power as a community.

SO, WHY DO WE ACT THE WAY WE DO?

I started speaking with my friends about this type of communication and they too found that they had similar experiences on both sides of the fence, ("do-err" and do-ee"). So I ask myself, "Why do we, outsiders to many, act with such adolescent behavior? Where does this behavior come from? Did this type of behavior originate in our childhoods when we first started to notice our feelings for our own sex wasn't "normal"? Perhaps, that's too simplistic an answer for you. Many believe that we have to begin to move away from making that "tired" excuse. But, it may be true in this case. We have all experienced shame as a result of being gay which manifested itself by feeling compelled to hide our sexuality from others. This type of behavior could cause a regression in our adolescent development specifically in terms of communicating well with others. So, how can we get out of engaging in this potentially hurtful behavior where we become very critical of ourselves and others? How can we learn to treat ourselves and each other with more respect?

In OUT Magazine(May, 1998) there was an article on the gay circuit party scene called "Dirty Dancing" written by Jesse McKinley." The article focused upon the different aspects of the popular club scene, and the different types of gay men who frequent them. One particular section of the article called "Night Moves-An Encyclopedia of Circuit Life," presented a glossary of popular jargon known within the 'circuit scene.' What struck my attention most was the term, "Whatever," which was quoted by McKinley as meaning an, "All-purpose response to everything from: "If you take another personal day, you're fired" to "I think we should just be friends." It is this type of indifferent response that concerns me most with regards to negative gay male communication. It demonstrates a disregard for another human being in order to preserve one's fragile ego. The images that come to mind are those of the 'bitchy' woman played in classic movies by such gay icons as Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, or Joan Collins interacting with the callous 'womanizer', often played by such film luminaries as Humphrey Bogart or Richard Gere.

WHAT I BELIVE TO BE TRUE ABOUT THE GAY COMMUNICATION GAME DYNAMIC AND HOW TO MAKE SENSE OF IT

My primary belief with regards to this communication game dynamic is that as a result of years of shame and guilt, attributing to a "delayed adolescence," a large percentage of gay men may act like immature teenagers in various social settings. The most serious consequence of this "delayed adolescent" behavior occurs when gay men are dismissive and devaluing while interacting with other gay men who they view as inferior. This behavior may be an unconscious way of making them feel better but, the results are at the expense of others whose own self-esteem is being attacked.

Now just what is this "delayed adolescence" and in what ways does it show itself in the behaviors of the many gay men who engage in it? Below are some examples:

- a. The continual use of gossip, devaluation, and the need to promote oneself at another's expense,
- b. Cliques, "strength in numbers," "mob psychology," whatever you wish to call it, as a means of insulating oneself through exclusion. A mob mentality predominates wherein membership within these cliques becomes a sign of status. Many gay men tend to **act** and even **look** like one another adopting a "safety in numbers" mentality similar to teenagers finding refuge in the solace of clique conformity.
- c. A predominance of guilt and shame which also contributes to the cause of devaluing behavior.
- d. Fear and anxiety regarding one's true sexuality which prevents gay men from "coming out" to friends and family members. This "double life" is draining and self-defeating and makes one incapable of honest communication.
- e. The lack of self worth also due to developing in a "less than nurturing environment" where being gay is has been and still is, viewed as a very poor life choice.
- f. An "attitude of superiority" toward others, and the treatment of other gay men as sex objects first and feeling human beings second; behaviors that are coping mechanisms adopted to mask feelings of inadequacy.

"Attitudes are based on values and more specific applications of those values to the events of the world around you. . . . An attitude can be defined as "primarily a way of being "set" toward or against certain things.'" (Zeuschner, 1997) It is this "delayed adolescence" which causes us to adopt an "attitude" that can separate us from others in those social environments that promote "cruising" and potential pairing such as bars, clubs, parties (including circuit parties), gyms, and any social environment where gay men gather and interact.

MY PLAN OF ACTION TOWARD UNDERSTANDING THIS GAY GAME MYSTIQUE

A number of gay men from several geographical locations throughout the U.S. will be interviewed for this book with a focus on subjects from the New York City area. Questionnaires will be sent to and completed by gay men throughout the United States and their responses will be included in the last chapter, "On-the-Street Interviews". It is my intent to gather information through these interviews to form a clearer picture of the causes of this communication dynamic and to find possible solutions if a problem is present and needs to be corrected.

Through the telling of a series of life stories of gay men from various demographics with added analytical commentary, you as the reader will begin to understand how the "game" is played when gay men communicate with one another in a predominantly social environment. For the purpose of brevity, I

am not including the professional or relational contexts in this book though there may be similarities to the social context as well.

In addition, the social behavior of gay men will be thoroughly examined with special attention being paid to the strong similarities between gay men and teenagers by including: answers of interviewees to targeted questions asked, stories told by the subjects interviewed for this book, and evidence from experts though documented source material:

Of special note, a very dramatic concern within the gay community has been an increasing concern with regards to the pervasiveness of gay men abusing Crystal Methadone or better known on the street as "Tina". The gay community has always been susceptible to addictive behaviors synonymous with those of shamed individuals. It is my contention that gay men who abuse alcohol, drugs, and sex, may in a sense, be acting out their unconscious shame of being gay. These shame-provoked behaviors are promoting a culture more interested in partying and staying unconscious than being productive, intimate with others, and self-loving; a culture that has little need, in fact stays away from, pursuing more intimate relationships which require hard work and self introspection. To support this theory, simply peruse the increasing number of gay-marketed magazines such as HX, NEXT and others in the New York City area alone, and note the predominance of ads for social events, bars, dance clubs, sex rooms, sex lines, etc. With all this fun and frivolity, one can easily be seduced by the lure of more immediate gratification and find little time to pursue more serious and meaningful relationships.

Transfer of Shame to Others: Shame is so intolerable that the individual attempts to redirect it to others. This defense leads to the development of judgmental attitudes, overly rigid standards, fault-finding and, even, contempt as a personality style. (Johnson, 1996)

Evidence of this overly judgmental behavior is epitomized by the focus of gay men upon the "perfect body type"; a phenomenon capitalized on by Calvin Klein in targeting a gay market for his underwear line by choosing a model with impeccably sculpted abdominal muscles to represent the brand. It is too often believed that obtaining the "perfect" body will produce fewer problems in life. Additionally, the man with the ideal body type becomes the "celebrity" within the gay community. As a result, a false ego forms based solely upon heightened physical appearance and not upon solid, emotional or spiritual attributes. It's almost as if there has been a "trade-off with the devil" wherein the essence of the "person" has been traded for the "look." A strong statement, sure, but sometimes one has to be strong in opinion in order to facilitate a change, or prompt some insight into one's behavior.

Repetition Compulsion: Unfortunately, all of these defenses against shame fail to relieve the self from the original pain and lead the person to endlessly repeat similar situations in which they are shamed again. The result is the development of a shame-prone personality." (Johnson)

According to Eric Marcus in his book, The Male Couples Guide, the author noted the tendency for many gay lovers to compete with one another in order to promote themselves, even above others with whom we are the most "intimate", and exemplifies the "blame/shame syndrome." He strongly advocates setting clear boundaries for what one partner can or can not do outside the primary relationship to avoid: blame or fault-finding. "Now that the physical passion has cooled, it doesn't seem like much else has been

holding the relationship together. Or you and your lover may compete with each other in a destructive way." (1992)

It is this type of behavior among couples and the other self-demeaning behaviors mentioned earlier, that The Gay Communication Game will attempt to illustrate further. Perhaps by citing examples of this "shame-prone behavior" we as gay men can become more aware and sensitive to the problems before us. If we do not address our self-destructive behaviors now, we are prone to repeat these dysfunctional behaviors throughout our lives. Awareness is the first step toward change. It is my goal to create awareness, encourage change, and offer constructive ways of eliminating or reducing the compulsion to play the "Game" in order to obtain and sustain more meaningful and loving relationships.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO 'LIFE STORIES' CHAPTERS (for literary agent's perusal)

- The following chapters will provide in-depth stories of those people who have been interviewed for this book. Each subject willingly volunteered to discuss their life stories with a special emphasis on the topic of gay male communication and how it has affected their lives. They also offer their various perspectives on the subject as it relates to other gay men.
- Each interview will be introduced with a full-page photograph of the interviewee by celebrated photographer David Cross. These photographs will be incorporated into the book to provide the reader with a visual image of the interviewee so the reader can better relate to the stories. Including these photographs with the stories also presents a powerful "coming out" statement for the interviewees in itself.

As you will see from most of the individuals interviewed, there are a significant number involved in the theater. This decision stems from my own involvement with the theater during the age of my "coming out." The theater was the one place where I felt I belonged. It was where my "sensitivity" was accepted and channeled into a creative venue. Of course, there was still some competition and an attitude of superiority between the actors and actresses at my school. Nevertheless, I loved being in thirteen plays in a two year period. It was also there where I made my official "coming out." I vividly recall going to the Catholic Center at my college and meeting a gay priest and a group of gay women who took me to Albany in 1972 for my first Gay Pride March. It was one of the most terrifying and thrilling times of my life!

A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE VARIED "LIFE STORY & LESSONS" CHAPTERS OF THE BOOK:

The following chapters in the book will tell portions of the "life story" of the interviewees while providing the "lessons" for the reader. In addition to including the responses of various subjects to questions asked, I will also provide on-going commentary throughout the interview. I will be specifically concerned with how my interviewees began to formulate their communication patterns with others, and when there were specific instances offering the potential for honest communication thwarted by the default to game playing and masking the truth.

I.CHAPTER ONE – TIM ROGERS- "DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL, DON'T BE NELLY" - Tim Rogers is a very sexual and dynamic man who attracts men easily. He delves honestly into

his childhood experiences and makes clear connections to how his present behavior relates directly to past. My primary focus with Tim is to find out what makes him so successful in meeting men and to question why, despite this talent, he still is unable to create a loving, nurturing, long-term, relationship, choosing instead to hold onto an unavailable lover/best friend.

II.CHAPTER TWO - BOB DOBSON - “LOOKING FOR THE WORLD’S APPROVAL BY BECOMING A SUPERSTUD” - Bob Dobson is an ex- police officer, close friend and past lover of Tim Rogers. Bob is a “larger-than-life” presence who also attracts men easily. He is a big kid with very impressive attributes who still seems to be searching for acceptance. My concern for Bob is to help him acknowledge how wonderful he is and to suggest that he not try so hard to be right.

III.CHAPTER THREE – WAYNE SCHERZER – “LIVING IN MORE THAN ONE WORLD” – Wayne is half Jewish, half Italian, and yet was raised in a W.A.S.P. background, going to private boy schools and Dartmouth College. In addition, he has had a successful career in the theatre and that career has sustained him both as a performer and a gay man; but, there are clear conflicts with regards to finding a loving relationship.

IV.CHAPTER FOUR – DAVID PEVSNER – “THE THEATRE WAS MY REFUGE” – David was my most out-spoken critic of gay male communication. As a successful playwright and actor, David came in contact with many gay men in the theatre and in his social world. Handsome and well-built, David enjoys a large group of admirers, but like many of my interviewees, has been unable to find a healthy and nurturing relationship. He also had many negative views on how gay men speak and interact with on another. Most notable, David is incensed by gay men posing in bars, thinking it’s ‘hot’ to scowl, when he believes it’s clearly *not!*

V.CHAPTER FIVE – ROY DOLINER – “FINDING HUMOR FROM SADNESS” –Roy is an accomplished comic and director who has found himself in the losing end of the gay communication game. Being very thin and as he says it, “too Jewish-looking”, he knows he has had to develop a good sense of humor to survive and conceal his true feelings. Having an acerbic wit that is engaging, he has accomplished a great deal in his life and has many excellent insights into the gay culture.

VI.CHAPTER SIX – TINA B. – “GAY MEN HAVE BEEN MY BIGGEST FANS” - Tina is a gay woman who is a talented comedienne and actress. Having been a street performer in the seventies she excelled in celebrity impersonations such as Bette Midler and Joan Rivers and had a large gay following. Gay men such as I, have always loved Tina’s wit and sensitivity, but like all the other gays in this book, has been unable to find a long-term life partner. Her comments regarding gay male communication are both entertaining and insightful.

· THE FINAL CHAPTER OF THIS BOOK – “ON-THE-STREET INTERVIEWS ABOUT GAY COMMUNICATION”- This chapter will include conversations with gay men and gay women, heterosexual men, and heterosexual women, on the subject of gay male communication. Similar to the other chapters, there will be on-going commentary and analysis by the author. The focus of this chapter will be to present many spontaneous viewpoints on the topic of gay male communication

POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEES AND CHAPTER TITLES:

STEVE TEAGUE - “A GAY WORLD TRAVELER & HEADLINER WHO JUST CAN’T FIND A BOYFRIEND” – Steve travels the world on luxury cruise ships. His observations and insights on gay male communication throughout the world are both voyeuristic and acerbic. Steve is also an amazing looking man who attracts men easily but like the others, has been unable to find a lover who can put up with his travel schedule and admitted narcissism.

IRINI RES- “A BEAUTIFUL SPIRIT WHO GENUINELY CARES FOR THE BOYS” - Irini Res is a yoga and dance instructor in one of NYC’s “hot” gyms, and is presently pursuing a professional career as a jazz singer. Her husband Chuck accompanies her on drums. Irini feels for others genuinely with obvious compassion and sensitivity. Her comments and observations about gay male communication will be honest and insightful.

ALDIS ALEXANDER –“OLGA THE TRAVEL AGENT” –Aldis is originally from Latvia and has been a travel agent for the past thirty years catering primarily to the gay community. His observations and insights regarding gay male behavior throughout the world will provide many rich and amusing anecdotes. Aldis will be the first to admit that he is no great beauty and has had to rely on his wit and dressing in drag to get attention.

DASHA SYNDER – “CREATIVITY AND CELEBRATION OF MY GAY IDENTITY” – Dasha is an accomplished screenwriter/producer who has recently sold her television series The “D” Word. She has an excellent attitude with regards to being gay and feels that each person is valuable, should be respected, and treated with dignity. It will be interesting to discover what in Dasha’s background has allowed her to resist engaging in the “Game” when forming relationships.

JEREMY GUSSICK & PARTNER – “LOVING AND RESPECTING MY PARTNER” – Jeremy and his partner Rick have agreed to be interviewed as a couple. Jeremy is a financial analyst and Rick is a real estate agent. They have been together for three years and celebrate monogamy in the relationship. Jeremy agrees with my position regarding selective communication in the gay male community but, enjoys being gay and in love.

RANDY JONES – “THE COWBOY FROM THE VILLAGE PEOPLE TELLS IT ALL” – Randy Jones is a well known celebrity in both the gay world and the world at large. His observations and insights on gay communication will provide many interesting stories and rich details, hopefully, about gay celebrities like himself. Randy recently married his lover Will Grega and appeared on the Tonight Show with Jay Leno.

DR. GARY BLICK – “THE FORWARD – MY EXPERIENCES WITH GAY SHAME” – it is my hope that Dr. Blick will write the Forward of this book. As a well-known and respected physician in the gay community, Gary is a personal friend and associate who is considered to be one of the most respected AIDS clinicians in the tri-state region. Most recently, Gary has been researching “Bug Chasers”, a particularly disturbing group of gay men who purposefully attempt to infect themselves with the AIDS virus.

SAMPLE CHAPTER 1

The first interviewee is Tim Rogers, a Floridian in his mid-thirties who can be considered to be someone who exudes a sexual energy that attracts men easily. Here is his story. . .

CHAPTER ONE – TIM ROGERS

“DON’T ASK, DON’T TELL, DON’T BE NELLY!”

Childhood & "Coming Out" Experiences

It was as early as 10 years old, when I first realized that I was attracted to men and not women. I always wanted to be around men and boys, but I never took part in the "gay scene" or, a gay relationship, until I joined the army. The truth be said, I never allowed myself to be gay or have a sexual relationship with another male till then. I used to fantasize about males a lot, but I was in a situation where it was not conducive to having a gay relationship. It even got to the point where I almost got married when I was young, thinking that it was the right thing to do. Thankfully, I never took that extra step.

I know it would have been a mistake if I had gotten married. I would have still been gay, and been married to a woman. It would have complicated matters a lot more. I did have a marriage of convenience when I was in the army that lasted for a total of four years! We were both gay. We basically did it for financial reasons.

At nineteen was when I had my first sexual experience with another man. It happened when I was stationed in Germany. I met some people who I thought were fun and attractive; the "In Crowd." So, I decided to "come out." Being born in Ohio and raised in Florida, Germany was like being on another planet! A perfect place to explore the urge!

It was very difficult being gay where I was raised. It was very difficult to be effeminate or different. You always had to be on the alert, or always be aware, if someone was going to call you a "fag." In fact, one

of my brothers used to call me a "girl" all the time. I used to get so angry with him. I used to try to hide it so much. Not that I was a girl. I wasn't an effeminate person even growing up. It seems that my brother could pick up on my feelings. I remember him always trying to act "cool." Trying to show everybody he was "Mr. Macho," where he could say or do anything he wanted to and people would listen. In my opinion, he was just this "Big Ole Redneck."

At this point Tim has basically admitted the need to hide his true sexuality for the sole purpose of survival and self-preservation. It appears that Tim's brother clearly suspects Tim's true sexuality and that the brother is attempting to separate himself from Tim by acting overly "macho" in order to protect himself from any suspicion of being gay as well. The brother's behavior toward Tim must have been very difficult for Tim to have to deal with on a daily basis. Also, the brother's "machismo" attitude is teaching Tim that to act in an overly masculine manner is the more appropriate way to act in order to divert suspicion of being gay. Both the brother's attitude and behavior were clearly instilling feelings of gay shame in Tim.

At present, my relationship with that brother is excellent. As I think about it, my relationship with my brothers and sisters when I was growing up was not so great. And it's funny because now, I don't think it could ever be better. I get along so well with all of them. They confide in me and I confide with them. We just get along so well! All seven brothers and two sisters! They love me and I love them. They look up to me.

It is interesting that the abusive relationship with the brother appears to be a thing of the past... Is Tim being completely honest here or is he already attempting to mask the truth regarding his relationship with his family? If that is true, then Tim's communication with others is already distorted in order to present a happy, more acceptable picture of what should be, rather than what is actually true. This type of behavior is called "masking".

Parents

All my brothers and sisters realized that as we were growing up, we didn't have anybody but each other. We had a really rough family life, as far as our parents were concerned.

My parents divorced when I was four. My mother was an alcoholic. She was just a mess, a complete mess. She was in and out of mental institutions as long as I can remember. We realized pretty early, that we only had one other. I think that lack of having a mother made our relationship with one another a whole lot stronger. Even up till today, that's what we base our relationship on. We just know that we have each other and that we'll always have each other.

My father was a caretaker only. He was always working and was never there, except . . . for discipline. My stepmother would say. . . "Such and such did this," and my father would react. He was really funny in a strange kind of way; because if you told him something that you did wrong and then managed to stay away from him for the first hour after he found out, you were fine. But if you were there when he first found out, forget it!

This parental history of having an alcoholic and emotionally disturbed mother and a distant and angry father where the children had to basically care for one another is both sad and disturbing. Also, with these parents being Tim's primary caretakers and role models, what kind of lessons of life does it teach Tim on how to treat others and visa versa? Most importantly, the fact that Tim's mom was an alcoholic and distant from her children places Tim and his siblings as life long members of ACOA or Adult Children of Alcoholics. In addition, parental histories like Tim's will most certainly lead to the strong possibility that more than a few of the children will inherit the same alcoholic or addictive tendencies of the parent or parents. The familiar adage: "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree", comes to my mind here.

Today, I still see my father as an odd kind of guy. My relationship with him is better than it's ever been! He and I get along so well. We're making up for a lot of lost time on both ends; my end and his. When I think about it, as I was growing up, I felt ashamed that I was gay; that I had let him down. As I'm growing older, and hopefully wiser, I'm realizing that he never looked at me in that way. It was only my perception of what he felt of me and not what he actually felt.

Tim is clearly trying to come to terms with the "reality" of his childhood relationship with his father by questioning his own perception of it at the time. He takes the "blame" for thinking that he had "let his father down" by being gay and then says he now believes his father never felt that way. Given the family background, where he grew up, and the childhood he describes, is this a reasonable assumption to make, or is it just another example of Tim trying to mask the truth and 'insulate' or shield himself from painful childhood memories?

I believe he felt that he couldn't communicate with me because, I wouldn't let him. I always felt I had let him down by being gay, and it was hard for me to get over that feeling. But now, I realize that he loved me as much as he loved them; the rest of my siblings. And he was always there and I wouldn't participate in his giving, because I was always beating up on myself. He's funny acting at times; hard to explain. He calls me all the time now and I'll say "Dad, is that you?" Sometimes I think it's weird that he calls me and asks for my advice.

For today, he lets me participate as much as I want to. He just wants me to be part of the family, which I am now. . . I used to really beat up on myself. . . I used to think my siblings. . . It's weird. . . I used to think my siblings. . . I thought they would hate me. . . I used to be afraid to be alone with their children because I would be afraid that they'd think I was molesting their children. . . But, they never thought that way. I discussed my feelings with them and they would say, "What are you talking about?" They are all comfortable with me.

This desire to present a loving picture with the father is a similar pattern to Tim's relationship with his brother. It is difficult to tell if Tim is being completely honest or wants me to feel that everything is okay in his life. I also question whether Tim has a pattern for hiding the truth from others; and if that is true, what is his communication with other gay men likely to be?

About Shame

I believe a lot of my negative thoughts about myself stemmed from that old shame of being gay. I think that with growing up in a small town and everybody saying, pointing the finger, saying it's not good to be gay. "Oh, he's a fag, he's. . . ." There was always a negative connotation associated with homosexuality. And as I was growing up, you certainly didn't want to be that type of person. That was definitely a "No-no!" Especially in my hometown, it was very small and very anti-gay.

My town was also very anti-black. They were a very racist and prejudiced people! The black people in my hometown, a suburb of Orlando, lived on the outskirts of the town. They weren't allowed to live in the city, or in the town itself! The town's attitude was racially constricted, very backwards in having any racial consciousness. What I would call a very "country- type" place.

Jewish people were unheard of; in fact, I never knew what a Jewish person was until I moved to South Florida. I never had a clue! I had heard the term, "Jew," but I never associated it with a type of person. When somebody said, "Oh, he's a Jew," all I would think is, "So, what's a Jew?" Jewish people were never in my town. It was mostly a black and white issue!

In some ways you could say that I had to hide who I was, just like a Jewish person in my town would have to hide who he was, but I hid my secret very well. I was very good at hiding my feelings. A black in my part of town would also have to keep his mouth shut and not start any trouble. Blacks were always being referred to as "niggers." We're talking about people who burn crosses on people's yards and stuff! Therefore, being gay was definitely something you would want to hide!

Tim admits that hiding the truth in order to survive bigotry and hatred was well- known to him. If one has a long history with hiding the truth from others, when does the lying stop, both to oneself and others. A black man or woman cannot hide their skin color, and a Jewish man or woman may not want to hide their faith and their heritage as in the film Driving Miss Daisy, but a gay man can feel compelled to hide his sexuality. For if Tim felt that hiding served a clear purpose then why stop? And, how would that pattern for lying and hiding one's true feelings become enacted when communicating with other gay men?

But to be completely honest with you, at this point of my life, I don't feel any shame or guilt associated with my homosexuality. Years ago perhaps, in a business situation, you may have felt shame when people generalize you with being part of their negative connotation of homosexuals, and you're immediately being grouped with them. But, I really don't have a lot of shame or guilt. I can't really pinpoint any time when I felt my homosexuality was a bad thing in my life!

Yet, in any type of work situation where people associate gayness with . . . especially in retail. . . "Oh, you're all fags; you're all fags that work here!" Then, you don't want to be associated as being gay in that situation. I can get really upset when I find out that someone, with whom I originally respected, had negative feelings about gays. It's as if you thought you had a higher position with them than you actually did. Suddenly, you realize that they looked at you more favorably only because they associated you as being as "straight" as they are.

I know that it is only my perception that they look unfavorably at me if they know I'm gay. It's difficult to let go of. And yet, I do believe my perceptions with that work environment were correct although, I did misperceive the situation with my family.

Tim is expressing strong feelings with regards to having his gay identity being exposed at work or, being made uncomfortable upon hearing derogatory comments about gays. This attitude does suggest an inner struggle with who he is and how he is perceived by others, which is common for most gay men. His anger at bigots is clearly justifiable, the question here has more to do with how he will act if confronted by a bigot, and whether he will be honest about his true sexuality? And yet, knowing Tim, I am positive, if the situation ever arose, he would choose to speak up for other gay men who may be on the receiving end of gay bigotry. As far as his family is concerned, Tim is honest about misperceiving his original thoughts about his family's potential reactions with regards to their acceptance of his homosexuality and that was fortunate for him.

Origins of Shame and Guilt

Society as a whole when I grew up, contributed to my feeling shame and guilt about being gay. How people looked at homosexuality as a bad thing...that you had a choice and you made the wrong choice similar to my small town of closed minds. But for today, I simply don't care anymore. I simply don't catch that attitude anymore! I think as the older you get, the less likely you are to put yourself in a situation where you'll be judged. You learn what kinds of situations not to put yourself in.

For example, the prevalent gay attitude of: "let's get out of Straights-Ville!" But, I think places like P-town are an extreme! Just as Key West, South Beach or Fire Island being only a few of the places where gay people can be comfortable. There are all these nice "gay meccas" to go to, but I don't think it's necessary to saturate yourself in gayness! There has to be a happy medium. I know it's nice to go to P-town to "party" and have fun, but I don't think it's a necessary part of being gay to go to a "gay mecca." What does letting yourself be as flamboyant as you want to be, have to do with being homosexual?

Again, Tim is making strong connections between homosexuality with flamboyance and gay shame. There appears to be some clear conflict with regards to associating his homosexuality with flamboyant behavior. Tim falls into a large, decades-old group of gay men who struggle with society's negative view of the gay community and desire to be accepted and approved of for who we are and not with whom we sleep.

I know that there are a lot of people who don't have the opportunity to be themselves that often. They feel they have to go to P-Town, Key West, Ogunquit, or the Pines, as if, they are the only places where they can have their sexual freedom or feel comfortable just being themselves. That's not necessary! I think the older you get, the more you don't feel you need all that! I mean, it's fun, it's a "party," but if you look at it as the only place I can go to be gay, then that's a problem!

Tim's last comment clearly affirms the need for all gay men to learn and accept that we can be comfortable being ourselves in other physical environments than just in the gay vacation "meccas" or sanctuaries such as the Pines, P-Town, Fort Lauderdale, Russian River, and the vacation destinations mentioned by Tim

Sexual preferences

I always remember wanting to spend time with men and, or, boys rather than girls. I wanted to be around men for as long as I can remember; always wanting to see certain attractive men naked...definitely, naked! That was really something that I fantasized about all the time. I hoped someday to be with a man sexually, but I was just too afraid.

I remember being turned on by my brother-in-law. I thought he was gorgeous! I always used to be looking at his body. He always had his shirt off! He was a big show-off. He knew that people were always checking him out. Being that he was a construction worker, he always liked to work out in the gym. He was a big construction worker who exuded sexuality!

The brother-in-law also appeared to play the role of the 'hot guy' who knew people where always "checking him out". This man also provided Tim with an effective role model for getting the attention of other men. A model which Tim clearly has copied, since he is also a sexy man who attracts other men easily and gained sexual and ego-boosting rewards as a result of his physical prowess.

An Official "Coming out"

I "came out" in 1977. I was hanging around with a group of people in the army. It was typical...it's so typical that it's not even funny. We all went out, got drunk, and I of course, ended up in bed with this guy. I must have passed out, and ended up waking up with his lips on mine. I remember the first time I kissed a man, it was like . . . I'll never forget . . . the feeling that it was. It's so weird how wonderful it felt.

He must have initiated the kissing and yeah, I responded! I remember feeling, "Oh, this is so weird," but it felt nice. It was weird. It was like a release. It was like opening a closed door and saying, "I'm out, I'm here!" We later became boyfriends for about two to three months. Then he it was so typical he suddenly didn't want anything to do with me, and I was heartbroken, because he was my first love. So, I retaliated by going to the gym and becoming the best looking, best dressed, and best everything that I could be. Then all of a sudden, he started to pay attention to me, and I didn't have the time for him! I was desired by so many others! It was very strange but, so typical. I see that happening all the time. Seeing how gay men build up their bodies to make a rejected lover jealous.

This last statement by Tim clearly represents the most crucial aspect of what The Gay Communication Game is all about, because it is as if Tim is saying: "That by building up my body to a point where it becomes the object of desire and lust by other men, I won't have to concern myself with feelings of rejection and disapproval. Now, this new body and my new-found sexuality will fill up all the emotional holes others may have caused. Not only that, but now this new body I created will allow me to be more in control and I can hurt others in the present as I have been hurt in the past." The following questions put to Tim will help elaborate this point further:

Interviewer question: "Are you saying that gay men feel compelled to: build up their bodies, be in the "hottest" clique, become the best they can be both physically and socially, simply to make others jealous of them?"

Right! That's exactly the way it happened! It's so funny. Because, all of a sudden, he didn't want anything to do with me and I was heartbroken. I remember that I cried, and cried, and cried, and I kept thinking, "What's wrong with me?" Then, all of a sudden I said, "I'll show you!" So, I went shopping! I got all the best clothes and started looking really sexy and wonderful. Then, all of a sudden, he wanted me back. So, I said, "Honey I don't want it anymore."

Shamed individuals strive for perfection, hoping that by being perfect, no one will make fun of them. Attitudes of false pride develop in which one's achievements are overly valued. Often a compensatory fantasy evolves in which people perceive themselves as misunderstood and underappreciated but, secretly, unique and creative. (Johnson)

I think he rejected me at first, because I was so in love with him, so quickly. In hindsight, I think he had a problem with intimacy. I can see now, that it probably was just that; especially, if you were a gay man who had as many relationships as he had, and seeing this eighteen year old clinging to him, wanting to always be with him. He was a good deal older than me, probably twenty two or twenty three.

My second question: "Oh, such an age difference! This rejection by him prompted you into action. You built up your body, bought the best clothes, only to make yourself more desirable to others, not just him. Is that the way you perceive the situation?"

Oh, definitely. I was the "Belle of the Ball" in Germany, from then on.

The Gay Armed Forces

The Army is, one, big, gay bar! I've never in my life ever seen a bigger gay community than I experienced in the Army. All the armed services! The Air Force, the Navy. . . It's all one, big, gay Mecca!

Its common knowledge among everyone in the military that, if you're in the Army, you know everybody is gay. Wherever you go, everyone is gay. It's really amusing to be an outsider looking in, with all the controversy that surrounds the service now, and knowing the: "Don't ask, don't tell thing." It's the funniest thing in the world because, it's all gay! Especially in the women's forces! There's a big lesbian community in the Army. In all the armed services!

The military provided Tim with a dual purpose: instilling a feeling of machismo by being seen as a warrior for his country, and offering Tim the opportunity of having many men to provide him with attention he needed to elevate the self esteem he lacked following a sad childhood and the rejection of his first lover's attention.

Being Gay Today

If I had to choose, I'd probably. . . . That's a hard question. I'd probably still choose to be gay but, there are a lot of things that I still don't like about it. There's a lot more openness involved in being gay today and, not as much of a stigma associated with being gay today as there was in the past. But, there still is a considerable amount of stigma today, as exemplified by the Christian Right Movement and their desire to suppress, but not as much as there was in the past. Being gay today, you don't generally hear, "Oh my God, you're gay! Even with AIDS? Now, it's changed a lot! Maybe people have become more sensitive to gays because of AIDS? I just don't know.

As far as the misconception of choosing to be gay, that seriously needs to change. I believe that "straight" people still have this false idea that we just sat down one day and said, "Oh, I think I'm going to be gay today." That just doesn't happen! It just doesn't happen that way! It's not a decision you just wake up with. It's not a social thing. I personally believe it's genetic! There may be social conditions involved that nurtured my gayness or homosexuality. But, you can't tell me I just woke up with this idea and decided I'll be gay today. I'll never believe that! I will believe that the same genetic factors that cause one to have brown hair or blue eyes, also contributed to us being gay and I'll never be convinced otherwise!

Tim's reactions to the 'straight world's confusion and derision with regards to the causes of homosexuality are understandable. Many gay men struggle with their own identity and their 'coming out' process as they seek self acceptance as well as acceptance from significant others in their lives. Many religious groups' condemnation of homosexuals only serves to fuel distrust and misunderstandings leading to feelings of hatred and division on both sides. Even the onslaught on AIDS has not lessened this polarization.

Self-Acceptance for Being Gay

I believe now, at this point in my life, it's more positive than it is negative to be gay. There are still negative feelings attached to being gay. You still have to be "on your guard." I don't believe in being flamboyantly gay in a straight situation. I don't believe that that's necessary. I don't believe you have to put on a dress just because you want to show somebody you're gay. I don't think that being gay is about that!

Some people feel the need to be loud and flamboyant in expressing their gayness in public. They believe "straight" people need to be shocked by those young men screaming for their freedom to do as they please. It's not always necessary to be so loud or flamboyant. Like, Gay Pride Parades and Gay Fests, although they can be a lot of fun, there are a lot of things that go on during them that give a particular perception to the "straight" world. For example, during the Boston Pride Parade, there was this guy parading down the street in a skirt, and he would be lifting his skirt and he had nothing on underneath!

Was that necessary? I don't think so. That is not what the gay world, or being gay, is all about! To these people that's all they see! And, it gives the impression that that's all we're about! And, we're not, obviously! We're normal. Aren't we?

At this point in the interview, Tim is clearly questioning what gay is supposed to look like. He has developed clearly negative attitudes with regards to effeminate or flamboyant gay men. This belief

appears based on a desire to avert himself from a negative stereotype that may be perpetuated by many in the heterosexual world who are unaware of the diversity within the gay community. Of primary concern, would be how Tim would speak and interact with other gay men who may act in effeminate or flamboyant ways.

The Big Breakthrough

The biggest breakthrough in my "coming out" process" would have to be letting my family know that I was gay, and if it was a problem, then it wasn't mine; it was theirs. I think that was the biggest thing because a lot of gay people live their entire lives not letting their families in on what's going on...what their lives are about...not letting them be a part of whatever it is they're going through because, they are gay. It's a big difference. It makes a huge difference! Therefore, I definitely advocate "coming out" to one's family. One day I just got up and said, "My family has to know! I have to be truthful with my family!" I was in a relationship at the time, so that might have prompted me to "come out." I thought it might have helped the relationship grow to let my family know and learn to accept us.

I decided right then, to let my family know basically all at the same time. I accomplished my goal all within a couple of months, or so. I remember talking with each and every one of them. And what was great was that I talked with them personally! It wasn't something where they told each other, "Oh, Tim is gay!" I had the opportunity to tell them all in my own words, that I was gay and this is how things are, and it was good. It wasn't a gossip thing. I simply needed to be truthful with my family.

You know, whenever I visited my parents, I had a man with me! So, I felt like, maybe they knew already...which in fact, they did! But, I still had to be open with them and tell them directly. Perhaps in time, they would not only see him as a friend, but as a lover. Perhaps I did it for myself as well. Now, I could come to their house, be comfortable and feel a part of a family without secrets.

Tim's decision to "come out" and be honest with his family was a very positive step toward self acceptance and communicating authentically with others. 'Coming out' in general, is intrinsically a very positive step in accepting and loving ourselves for who we truly are, and whenever we take those conscious steps toward self love, that self-love will be communicated to others as well. Tim's honesty with his family about who he truly is communicates to them that he accepts who he is and opens the door to letting his loved ones into his life.

Now that I think about it, there are a few of them, like my Mom and Dad, where I don't think it would have made a big difference by "coming out" to them.

Two Moms

My mother is still around. But, I don't view her as a mother figure. I look at her I don't know. It's a strange relationship very strange. I almost look at her as if she's my child. It's weird. I always feel this need to take care of her. With my stepmother it's different. She and I have a good relationship. We're both honest and open with each other, actually, brutally honest with each other!

With my step-mom, I know that if I have to ask for something, she'll tell me straight out what I need to hear. She won't "sugarcoat" anything, she'll just tell me! It's good that I have an alter-ego like that! That if you ask her for advice, you don't want to hear "sugarcoat!" If you want to hear the truth, you'll get it!

Tim's stepmother is clearly being described as a good role model for honest communication. Perhaps she will also be able to play the stronger maternal role for Tim since his biological mother has been unable to do so. Unfortunately, having had an inadequate maternal role model in his life, Tim has become emotionally disadvantaged and is suffering the consequences in his personal life, specifically in forming healthy relationships with others.

Bob, the Ex-Love and the Love of My Life

My family all have accepted Bob as another kid! They love Bob. Everybody loves Bob! I guess it's because they don't really know about the dynamics of our relationship. It's hard for anybody to understand! The only important thing is that I can understand it. *(Bob and Tim have been lovers for years but for now, they are only roommates and close friends with separate boyfriends).*

Being here in Cape Cod with Bob every year is my most satisfying gay experience. I love coming here to the Cape. It's not sexual between us any more, but it can be. It's mostly where I feel the most comfortable in my life!

There's a certain tranquility attached to my summer vacations up here that I look forward to and yearn for, every year. It's also a time when Bob and I "click" a lot. A lot! It's like we're on the same wavelength and we think alike. It's a very bonding thing for both Bob and me.

I can easily say that my relationship with Bob is the highlight of my life and he definitely knows that! And, I believe he feels the same. At least I'd like to believe he does. (Soft laughter).

It doesn't sound as if Tim feels very secure in his relationship with Bob and I doubt whether a vacation home in a tranquil setting will help change that or fulfill Tim's unspoken wish to be back in love with Bob.

Our present relationship is really complicated. There are those people who do understand it; and those are the people I want to be around. Mine and Bob's relationship has changed a lot! It's weird. It's like we're life partners. Just not in a sexual sense as much anymore; not like we used to. We just know that when all else fails, we have each other.

Bob's last boyfriend appealed to Bob's paternal instincts, because Julio was like a child. With my boyfriend, it's very spiritual. He understands my relationship with Bob. He understands there are a lot of years between Bob and I that we are like brothers. Yes, like brothers! I know that I have plenty of brothers, Bob doesn't! My boyfriend understands my relationship with Bob is like a brother.

I'm aware that no boyfriend is going to replace Bob for me. I believe my lover is just looking for what I can give him, and what he can offer me. At present, I'm just not sure. Our relationship is too early to figure out. I know he's special in a way. He's certainly not a trick, or someone I just picked up! He's a

boyfriend. He's very genuine. It's nice when you find someone whom you can really relate all the dynamics between Bob and me. It's very important that no boyfriend throw any shame or guilt at my loving relationship with Bob, very important!

*The dynamics of Tim's relationship with Bob are predictable as a result of Tim's lack of a primary maternal role model. As previously discussed in the "Two Moms" section of this interview, this kind of dysfunctional relationship often results in forming unhealthy love relationships with men. I believe Bob to be emotionally unavailable to Tim. The fact that Tim has a tendency to draw lines or emotional boundaries with potential boyfriends because of his feelings for Bob, prevents Tim from having true intimacy with other men...including Bob. For example, why should any man **have to accept** Tim's relationship with Bob in order to have a relationship with Tim? Tim is in a sense, starting each potential relationship with clear conditions and restrictions, which I believe is unfair to others who want to be the primary relationship in Tim's life.*

South Yarmouth, Cape Cod - the "New P-Town!"

Being comfortably gay can be as easy in South Yarmouth, Cape Cod as it can be in P-Town, or even in West Palm Beach, or wherever! It's where you "hang your hat and let your hair down." For me personally, the reason I can do that is that I know I'm not going to put on a dress and march through the streets of Hyannis! I am comfortable with my own sexuality, so it doesn't matter to me what others think. I don't feel any different from any of them.

I fit in wherever I go. I am someone who is comfortable in my own skin. Now, more than ever! I think that's something that a lot of people don't get. Don't you? I think a lot of people go through their lives not, "being comfortable in their own skin." I find it's particularly true in the gay world! People are simply not comfortable with themselves due to a lack of self esteem. It's a basic feeling around gay people that you can't be gay! It all has to do with social limitations and social conditioning. It's almost a form of brainwashing!

I am in complete agreement with Tim with regards to many gay men feeling "uncomfortable in their own skins". I also view Tim to be someone who enjoys being gay since it affords him many prizes with regards to feeling included within a group; and the success he sustains in meeting men; a clear boost to his ego. The "brainwashing" statement clearly relates to society's conditions for what a man is supposed to act like and the rituals he is to follow, such as marrying and having a family, and in so doing, conform to what the general society deems as normal and more acceptable behavior.

Shame and guilt /Adverse effect on gay men interactions/ Attitudes of Superiority & Indifference toward other gay men/ "Clique" Behavior

Shame and guilt did not have an adverse affect on me. Again, the longer you live, the less you tolerate those behaviors! You're purposefully choosing not to tolerate the banality of most of the cliques. But then, aren't you creating your own clique? Do you know what I'm saying? I'm saying that you choose your surroundings! You choose who you want to be around! I believe we choose a group of people to surround us to whom we feel safe and comfortable with.

Ouch! Tim is contradicting his previous statement with regards to “shame and guilt not having an adverse affect on me.” It is clear that shame and guilt has had a profound effect on him as it has on most gay men. In fact, it is almost impossible for gay men not to have shame and guilt with all the messages thrown at us by society and the media. With regards to his own shame and guilt, Tim stated earlier the effect that racism enacted by people in his birthplace toward minorities caused him to hide his gay sexuality. This behavior is a clear result of feeling shameful for who he is and feeling guilty for his sexual thoughts towards men.

Heightened Interpersonal Boundaries: The shamed individual tries to protect the self from intrusion by others and exhibits marked guardedness and a strong need for control over situations. The ability to compromise becomes impaired because ambiguity or gray areas are avoided. Organizations of shamed individuals therefore tend to fragment easily. (Zeuschner)

Tim does make a good point with regards to cliques being formed by those who group together with a common purpose, even if that purpose is to criticize other cliques. Cliques can and do serve an intrinsic purpose of providing some comfort and support during moments of fear and uncertainty in the personality-forming, developmental years. My primary concern is when cliques are formed to purposefully hurt and ostracize others.

For some of us, our own families provide us with that "safe place." For others, we make our friends become another sort of family. You'd like to think that your group of friends is like your family, in the respect, that you can be yourself and let them be themselves as well. You can't judge them. You have to try to love them and help them when they need it.

Tim's statement does confirm the tendency for many gay men and women to form a family of friends as a consequence of not having supportive and accepting members in their own families. Every human being needs to derive feelings of comfort and support from others, and if their family does not provide that comfort and support, then they must seek it somewhere else. Yet, I find it always somewhat disconcerting whenever I hear that a friend is alone at the holidays because they are no longer welcomed in their parent's or family member's home.

It's so important to feel comfortable in your surroundings. The primary or a principal relationship cannot be a superficial thing. You need to feel comfortable with the people you choose and simply know that your friendship will be there no matter what happens, or where you may go or, become... "Through thick or thin!" ...Through good times and bad times.

But, there are only a limited number of people you can do that with. I've always considered myself lucky that I can have a relationship with more than one person at a time. Not necessarily sexual. I know that I can give to each person what they want and what they need and still, get what I want from them! Not in a "using" standpoint but, from a "friendship" standpoint. I just feel I have a lot of love to share and that people can get whatever out of it!

At this point in the interview I am a little confused as to what Tim means by “having a relationship with more than one person at a time”? Is this relationship a friendship or another intimate, romantic

relationship? My assumption is that Tim feels that he can sustain two romantic and intimate relationships at the same time, as long as he keeps one of those relationships nonsexual. This type of 'mindset' clearly appears to be potentially explosive and somewhat unrealistic. The principal question here is why does Tim need to place himself in the middle of a potentially explosive and clearly dramatic situation?

Loving Two Men at the Same Time.

I know that many gay men wouldn't want to jeopardize a present relationship by introducing another partner; and yet, gay men are simply not "comfortable in their own skins." They are not comfortable with who they are. I feel lucky to be bonded with Bob, and sexually and spiritually connected with Richard. I desire only to be with those individuals who can understand and accept my relationship with Bob. I'm comfortable with gay men who do understand.

Tim has clearly drawn the lines here and equates being "comfortable in one's own skin", with being able to accept a complicated and potentially unworkable situation that one partner demands the other to accept. What are your responses to Tim's conditions? Would you accept them from the outset of the relationship if you felt the potential partner was worth the effort? I, for one, would have to step back from the relationship and seriously consider what I was potentially getting myself involved in by pursuing a relationship with Tim.

Competition on the Beach or at the Gym

It's a predominant factor in gay life. The way gay people act has a lot to do with guilt and shame. That they grew up not being comfortable with themselves or others. The way gay people act has a lot to do with their psychological and sociological backgrounds.

Tim's statements clearly reflect some truth with regard to gay men having feelings of guilt or shame about being gay and how those feelings result in them acting out in their relationships with others. Could this guilt and shame also have something to do with the conditions Tim places on potential boyfriends in requiring that they accept Bob as Tim's significant other? If someone is filled with gay shame and guilt, how can they sustain healthy intimate relationships with other gay men?

I know that "straight" men are constantly commenting on women's "tits and ass;" wanting to "fuck them." Heterosexual women are very blunt nowadays about men's butts and their physiques. Women often say that they're more interested in the emotional relationship but, we see the popularity of the male strip joints with women. They're acting just as sexually aggressive as men are!

I do believe though, that the pursuit of sex is more predominant in the gay world. That's how we develop relationships in the gay world; the emphasis is on physical attraction. You'd like to think it's not how you look but, what's in here (pointing to his heart) inside. What attracts you first is their looks, but you want there to be something inside that keeps you stimulated, and not necessarily a "big dick" or a "bubble butt!"

Sexual attraction and conquests provide immediate gratification and ego stroking but, the sexual act often leaves the pursuer with feelings of emptiness once the sex act is completed and the sex partner leaves. Tim's comments, that heterosexual's focus on sexual behavior is similar to gay's, simply reflect the predominance in which both cultures value sexuality over the formation of more stable emotional bonds. Sexual gratification is important but not as self-affirming as forming and maintaining loving intimate relationships. Gay men's sexual communication is at the center of the way gay male culture is perceived. This phenomenon continues to be emphasized in such television shows as Queer as Folk, but as Tim stated, sexual conquests have a short shelf life and we must learn to look past sexual "wins" and focus upon more loving and stable interpersonal connections.

Relations with the 'Straight World?'

There are a lot of gay people you don't interact with a lot of people in the 'straight world'. You tend to be, always on your guard, for fear of some type of fallout that being gay will affect your relationships with heterosexuals. I don't fear being physically attacked as much now as I did in the past. I simply don't feel it's necessary to expose yourself to people who don't need to know you're gay.

It is sad that many gay men often choose not to interact socially with heterosexual men and women for fear of potential non-acceptance and discomfort. Unfortunately, many men such as I do recall personal instances of verbal, emotional, and physical abuse by "so-called" heterosexual men and women. But then again, I often question how heterosexual the men truly are, since many acts of violence toward suspected gay men are often the acts of closeted and terrified homosexual men who can't deal with their own suspected homosexual feelings. This despicable behavior by abusive men is not what I would classify as a game but rather as a crime!

I was lucky...luckier than most! I'm comfortable with all my siblings, but sometimes, I wonder why there isn't another one like me. I mean, don't the statistics state one out of ten are gay or bisexual? But, it still isn't that important because I feel comfortable with all of them, gay, straight, or bisexual.

It would be neat if one of my siblings were gay. It would be a really neat thing! But, I don't feel alone being the only gay one. I just think it would be "cool" if one of my brothers was gay, though I never longed for an incestuous relationship with one of my brothers! (laughs) The thought kind of turns my stomach, although all my brothers are gorgeous! It's funny, because Bob has wanted to "jump my brother's bones" before. (Smiling) He'd say like, "Why don't you ask him to come down and visit. He can sleep with me!" My usual response was an unequivocal, "No!"

Tim conveys a strong impression of being unusually at ease with his feelings toward his brothers and Bob, so much so, that he feels strong enough to even discuss the possibility of Bob having sexual relations with one of his brothers. Tim's own sexual feelings towards his brothers and the possibility of having a sexual and intimate relationship with a potentially gay brother are most curious. In addition, the fact that Bob has made such provocative statements about Tim's brother, causes me to question Bob's sensitivity for Tim and his own sexual compulsiveness. Tim and Bob appear to have a very interesting relationship. Specifically, with regards to the ways Bob is "messing with Tim's mind", playing a game with his head.

I am glad to have a lot of heterosexual friends in my life today and I do believe they relate to me just as normally as they relate to their heterosexual friends. I don't believe it's any different. I surround myself with heterosexual friends who are open-minded. It's funny with heterosexuals. They often look at homosexuals as a sexual relationship only. They don't look at it on the level of interaction. They seem to believe that the only reason we're homosexuals is because of this sex thing, and it's not! Sometimes, that idea really upsets me! It does bother me that they think it's all about sex! But in fact, it's no different from their relationship with each other; which is probably all about sex as well!

Tim is basically reinforcing the misconception heterosexuals have about homosexuals by saying that both groups form relationships based upon sex. And yet, Tim, within the next sentence seems to reject this misconception by saying that we're homosexual for reasons other than sex. Tim's inner conflict with regards to his sexual identity is shared by the majority of the gay community who struggle to understand and accept their sexuality.

I think the older you get the more you surround yourself with only people you feel comfortable with. You certainly don't want to surround yourself with people who have a problem with you, or, with what you're thinking! Being gay is not about only sex! So, don't go asking me, "Why do you do this, and why do you do that?" I choose not to surround myself with those people, asking those questions.

Tim is clearly drawing another line between himself and others by stating he wants nothing to do with bigoted or self-righteous people. My question is, "When does Tim stop drawing lines and begin to examine why he feels the need to draw lines between himself and others"? People ask questions because they're curious and want answers to perhaps correct their misconceptions. For how can we bring about change in ignorant people's attitudes if we don't try to talk about our lives openly, and hopefully establish a dialog?

"Coming Out" - A Step Toward Acceptance?

"Coming out of the closet" was most definitely, a very important step for me. Throughout my life in fact, I've never really had to fight the fact that I was a homosexual. I know a lot of homosexuals deal with that question: "Am I gay, or am I not gay"? Or, "I know I'm gay but, I can't be gay!" I don't think I've ever had to deal with any of that before. I feel really lucky about that! I've never felt the need to question who I am. I always knew what I was! Being a heterosexual simply "wasn't in the cards." I just always knew that I was a homosexual.

I quickly began to welcome my true sexuality. I embraced it! (Pause) It's funny how we perceive ourselves, and how others perceive us, and the difference between the two. I've always perceived myself as not being...just normal...always being, a little bit off center. I'd like to think that people see me as not your "Average Joe" but also, not being too off the average!

Tim is presenting a much healthier attitude here, even with a good sense of humor that is very attractive. Being able to joke about one self is very important because it suggests a sense of comfort and inner security.

Most Significant Role Model during the "Coming Out" Process

(Pause) I believe the most significant person I met when I was "coming out," would not be just one particular person but, this group of people I knew when I was in the Army. This group of men and women were older than me and I would look at them and see this comfort level that they associated with being gay. I think that substantially propelled me to "come out." I would look at them and say to myself, "Oh, wow! These people are living comfortably and they look happy, and that's how I want to be myself!" So, to this day, I continue to look toward older people who are gay, and learn from them, essentially by the examples they set and the choices they make.

Being an older gay man, I appreciate Tim's comments about older gay men being role models for younger gay men, because I believe it is our duty to be mentors for other gay men to follow our example. I recall my "coming out" experience, and I wish I had someone to mentor me or show me the way. Gay men have had an important role in the shaping of our world history and every important lesson learned should be shared with others in order to promote a decrease in ignorance and fear.

Advice to Younger Gay Men on "Coming Out"

I would tell them that: it isn't easy I mean it can be easy if you let yourself be yourself. But, if you choose to hide behind a facade or a mask, or try to be somebody different from who you are or, it isn't necessary to be outrageously flamboyant! I think that as a group, we need to be more focused as a group of gay men that have a common agenda, rather than each individual having their own personal agenda! In the gay world, there's simply too much scattering with no actual bonding.

Tim's statements reinforce Zeuschner's and my earlier comments regarding "shamed individuals" and their tendency to fragment and not bond as a community with a common agenda. Unfortunately, many people who wear masks, fake smiles, or even scowls, are unaware of their behavior, and subconsciously believe that they are being served by the façades they create. Being overly 'butch' or 'flamboyant' can also be viewed as a mask if it is behavior engaged in to hide true feelings. Basically, it is fear-based behavior.

For today it's so important to be yourself! Being "real" with other people and not putting so much emphasis upon what I have, and what you don't have! That's what keeps us scattered!

Best Pick-Up Line

(Laughs) My best "pick-up line" is really funny, but it works every time! If I meet somebody in a bar that I like the look of, I use this line. It's my best line but corny, and yet, it works every time! I'm basically a shy person when meeting someone for the first time. In fact, most people are intimidated by me and don't view me as a shy person. But, if I see someone I like, I walk up to them and say. . .

(laughs) This is a classic! I'll say, "Don't I know you from somewhere?" It works every time! Every single time, I swear! And usually, it is someone that I have met somewhere, like Miami or New York. It's funny, but I have another line when I see someone in the bar that is really pretty. I'll go up and say, "you're too pretty for this room!" They always like that. It's funny.

Of course it doesn't hurt if you are handsome and self-confident yourself and exude that self-confidence when you approach that lovely man across that crowded room. Tim's self-confidence with meeting and capturing men's attentions were never a problem for him following his ego-stroking military experiences, but his ability to sustain a loving and healthy long-term relationship has been a big problem.

I met my boyfriend with the "Didn't I know you from somewhere" line. I remember he responded, "Yeah, I think I do know you from somewhere?" I just think it's an okay way to "break the ice" despite the fact, that it's so corny. Actually, the homosexual community or specifically, the "gay circuit" is relatively small when you consider those guys who go out a lot to parties or the clubs. You always seem to be running into the same group of guys over and over. Like, when Bob and I go to Boston Pride every year, we always see the same group of guys every time! I mean, the homosexual community may be large but, it's still small in several ways.

Yes, because the gay community that Bob and Tim appear to connect with and attract are all very attractive and personable young men who enjoy the company of men who look and act in similar ways as they do. This point reinforces the choices many of these gay men make in accepting only certain groups of men and excluding others who do not fit the appearance and attitude that they find physically attractive and emotionally satisfying. This behavior of exclusive selection is very similar to someone choosing steak instead of chicken or, wine instead of beer and refusing to try other foods or drink.

Attractive Physical Attributes

I like a gay man who is not necessarily big, but that he takes care of himself. He cares enough about himself to dress nice or dress decent. It's a look. It's not necessarily huge and muscular or whatever. It's a look! If they have that look, it's evident that they care about themselves.

Non-Physical Attributes to Find Attractive?

Conversation! Conversation is very important especially, when you first meet someone. Stimulating conversation is probably the first thing I find most attractive! Also, unsloppiness! I can't stand a messy guy at all! But ability to converse is still the most attractive attribute. I don't believe there's anyone out there who's boring. Everyone has something to say, if one will only take the time to listen.

This statement appears to be very open and inclusive for Tim but appears based more on intellectual or emotional stimulation and less on physical or sexual attraction. I would never say that Tim tends to not include people of all types and appearances from being his friend or acquaintance. Whether he would rebuff their advances if they chose to pursue him on another level comes into question here; but I believe that most gay men such as Tim would naturally tend to place a good deal of importance upon an attractive physical appearance before pursuing a more intimate physical and emotional relationship with someone. Then again, don't most people feel a physical and emotional attraction is essential before pursuing a relationship beyond the initiation stage to deeper levels of intimacy?

Unattractive Attitudes

Oh, that's easy. There are a lot of attitudes in the gay world! The one attitude that I find most disturbing is those people who think that they are "the set," the "jet set or, the "A List." I don't even want to be a part of whatever they're all about, because they're not about anything!

- People will look at you and ask, "Did you go to so and so's party last week? Oh, weren't you invited? (Tim is making a sour face at this moment) I say, "Who cares?" I find it so unattractive in people. It makes them shallow and very unattractive. I don't care how good looking they are!
- Femininity in a big, butch man is a big turn-off! (Making a disgusted face). I can't stand a big, butch man dressing up like a girl. I don't find that attractive at all!
- People who are out only for themselves. Selfish, egotistical queens!
- People who abuse drugs on a daily basis. It's fine to "party" with but, there's a time and a place for drugs.
- What really "gets me," are people who think they are better than everybody else.

Tim's negativity about feminine and flamboyant men is no surprise since he mentioned those feelings several times during this interview. Was his macho brother successful in instilling these feelings in him in his boyhood? His contemptuous feelings toward snobbish behavior and drug abuse are important. In fact, the attitudes and behaviors that he has elaborated upon are those behaviors that are my principal concern with regards to how gay men speak and interact with one another in social settings. Many of these behaviors are the result of feelings of insecurity whereupon certain people will only select others who conform to their list of specifications, and slight or ignore others who don't have the attributes they require. To conjure an extreme example, this judgmental behavior reminds me of that engaged in by the French aristocracy during the time of Marie Antoinette and King Louis XVI. . . . and we all know what happened to them!

Attractive Behaviors

Basically, the opposite: people who have a positive attitude; people who can't be so close-minded to think, that just because you're not as attractive as they are, you therefore have nothing to offer them! So many people have so much to offer you and I; heterosexual or homosexual, just listen to them! These close-minded people don't bother to listen to what people are saying, and it's a shame, because you can learn so much.

Future Gay Life

What everybody else wants to achieve: financial stability, not necessarily in a gay world but, in the world itself; religious comfort...I want to feel that we are all here for a purpose, and our interactions with other people is not just chance but that it's predetermined guide that is set forth for you. You just want to be happy. I don't have any goals that I think have been unfulfilled. If I were to die tomorrow, I think I would feel comfortable with where I've gone and where I've been. Who knows, I may die tomorrow?

AIDS

I do feel that because of AIDS, a lot of gay men view themselves as short term. I think that AIDS has had a definite impact on the community. I believe that it has changed the way we think about certain things. AIDS is definitely prevalent in our thinking, more so than ever! AIDS is not a good thing!

I do view AIDS as bonding our "scattered gay community," but I do believe that we still have a long way to go. For instance, the AIDS Ride that I recently participated in with Bob was the most bonding thing I've ever done in my life. AIDS definitely changes your thinking. I've watched seventeen of my friends die so far and, I know that number plus who are sick right now. Some of my closest, best friends have all died. It's weird, because each one that has passed away . . . I can still feel them in here. (Points to his heart) They're all here! Sometimes, I'll be walking down the street and I'll say, "Oh, there's David," or I'll say, "Oh, there's Mark." In the respect that someone will do something that was so like them. It's a weird thing, AIDS, in that it's just changed our community.

I agree completely with Tim's heartfelt sentiments since I have lost many friends to AIDS as well; the fact that many of us have suffered due to AIDS, makes it more important to live our lives more lovingly and honestly.

There are some positive things that have come out of it. People seem to be a little bit more, deeper. I think that it's a good point that you brought up, that it has bonded us a little bit more, but it's still not a good thing! Some days I wish I could just erase it, because it has hurt so many people who you've loved.

Closing Comments

Stop AIDS now! You know, telling my story was fun. It was really fun. It helped me to think about a lot of things. For instance, when Bob and I first came down to Boston, we met a guy that we later "picked up" who was HIV-positive. One of the first things that he said to us was, "I'm HIV-positive." I'll never forget the impact that had on Bob and I; that this person had thought enough to say that, when people don't normally say, "I'm HIV-positive." But, the impact he made on us. . . he's been a really good friend of ours to this day! It wasn't as sexual as it, loved. We're really good friends today with Michael. It was weird, because you could tell that people had shunned away from him because of his HIV status.

He is still alive and gorgeous! He was really beautiful then, and still is! He helped set the standard of telling up front, "I'm HIV-positive and if you have a problem with it, tell me now!" That's powerful! He is the model of the type of gay man that really impresses me today.

Tim reinforces my premise that being honest and caring toward others can truly make someone appear more powerful and beautiful in the eyes of observers. Tim's closing statement that "Michael set the standard" proves the importance of being genuine and caring toward others. Tim's reaction to Michael's candor inspires us as gay men to strive to live our lives as positive role models for our gay brothers.

END OF CHAPTER ONE

The next-to-final chapter following the “Life Stories” chapters will be dedicated to “On the Street Interviews” with many gay men on the subject of gay male communication and their impressions on how the gay culture influences that communication. The conversations below are representative of those to be included in the final chapter.

A RECENT CONVERSATION I HAD WITH THREE GAY MEN AT GOLD’S GYM IN NYC on Gay Communication - May 19, 2005:

Ivan, Fred & Jeff (three attractive men who often work out together)

Fred (age 25) – I don’t feel that there is a problem communicating with gay men in NYC because there is such a large pool of gay men to choose from.

Jeff (age 36) – You don’t have a problem because you are very sociable and will talk to almost anyone!

Fred – That’s true. But, I can see other gay men having problems communicating with one another especially here at the gym.

Jeff – I tend to have less of a problem approaching men I’m not attracted to as compared to men I am attracted to, because I have more at stake with men I’m attracted to.

Ivan (age 45, mostly quiet but attentive) – I am told that I am not easily approachable. Someone told me I should smile more and then I would be less intimidating.

Interviewer: Yes, I noticed you wearing a shirt from NYU, my alma mater so I felt comfortable approaching you.

Ivan- Really, why? Did you think I was a bitch before? (Group laughter)

Interviewer: Why do you say that? Have people called you a bitch in the past?

Ivan - Yes! One time someone wrote me on an internet site called Gaydar and said I was very unapproachable.

Jeff – That is because they don’t know you, I find you to be very approachable but, I know you.

Ivan – (Pause) You know, I think I would love to read a well-written book on gay male communication. Good luck with it because I feel it’s a very important topic for people to read.

This group of three was clearly listening to one another and all agreed that gay communication can be a problem when based on superficial first impressions and fear of rejection. It was very interesting to witness how the three men took their time to answer my questions in their effort to understand the potential dynamics of gay male communication in various social settings, and especially, at the gym.

THE FINAL WORD SUMMARY

**Following the “Life Stories” and “On-The Street Interviews” chapter, I will summarize any final observations and insights with regards to gay male communication and offer helpful and supportive advice to my readers on how to improve upon their behavior and their interactions with other gay men in the final chapter called “Final Words”. The following is representative of some of the anecdotal stories that will be presented as well as, the “Questions to Mull Over” section:*

FINAL WORDS

I was shopping at a local farmer's market in Connecticut browsing through the produce section when I came upon three teenage girls giggling and commenting on a cute boy who just walked by them. It was quite obvious that those girls liked the boy, a fact of which he was well aware, but they simply smiled sweetly as he walked past them never attempting to engage.

Last week, I was enjoying the evening with some friends at a popular New York City bar called G Lounge. I noticed three very attractive young men conversing next to us. One particular man in the trio was being greeted by several male acquaintances as they walked by him. Each time someone passed this fellow he would make funny faces and laugh to his friends, commenting negatively on each acquaintance when they passed. I reflected upon the three girls at the market and compared them to those three young men at G Bar. NOT MUCH DIFFERENCE, but the teenage girls for the most part, were sweeter to their male counterparts; not as “bitchy.”

Another story told to me by a close friend concerned a surprise birthday party in Manhattan where there was a large group of handsome gay men drinking cocktails waiting for the birthday boy to arrive. The lights were shut off and as the birthday boy entered the darkened room, the lights went on but, NO ONE yelled “Surprise!” Instead some people simply said, “Hi.” The storyteller conformed to the mass behavior and stopped himself from screaming “Surprise,” and said nothing for fear of embarrassing himself. This is a good example of the “pack mentality”, but what’s its benefit? Who is served here?

"For the most part, we live a "retarded adolescence." I know there are exceptions to everything. All I know is that my adolescence was not a normal adolescence for me, because if I had a normal adolescence, I would have dated the boys that I was attracted to. I couldn't! I had to stop those feelings; otherwise, I would have been called a "fag" when I was six years old! (David Pevsner, N.Y., 2002).

QUESTIONS TO MULL OVER

In conclusion, the following questions will further assist you in finding some of those insights into the origins of our behavior and the behavior of others. I hope these questions will “pop” out at you and cause immediate recognition and insights.

I. ASK YOURSELF

- Have you been going to the same gym for years and NOT spoken at length with more than three or four people there? Also, what are your criteria for talking to someone in the gym? (Gyms

in the gay culture are known for being major social "hot spots" for most gay men to cruise, socialize and compete with one another).

- Has a recent lover ever passed you by in the street without saying a word to you?
 - * What are your impressions of the Pines, Cherry Grove, Castro Street, South Beach, and Provincetown? How about West Hollywood, Atlanta or "Hotlanta," Chicago, Dallas, or New Orleans? You name the city? Are these impressions based more upon past sexual or romantic successes? Does each city or area promote a certain image for you as being "hot" or "not?"
- Do you think you're "HOT?" If so, does that feeling predominate your communication with other gay men who either fit or don't fit that category; and what do you believe is the result?
- Are you habitually late for appointments with friends? Do you confirm plans with friends prior to traveling to the agreed-upon destination or not? Are you ever late for a "hot date" feeling it is more important to show him you're not anxious or too excited to see him?

NOW THINK, AND BE HONEST. . . .

- Do you feel invisible in most gay circuit parties?
- Is your dog your most trusted friend?
- Do you wish you weren't gay? Would life be easier if you weren't? Could you be more open with others if you weren't gay?
- How do you feel about women? Do you like them? Do you wish to make love to them? Do you believe that your feelings about women have had any impact on how you feel toward other gay men?
- If you saw a beautiful woman sitting alone in a cafe looking lonely, what images would come to your mind? What feelings?
- Do you envy heterosexual men; are you often uncomfortable around them?
- Do you feel that you'll never be part of the "A List?" If you are part of the "in group," how does it make you feel? How do you relate and interact with men outside of your "in group?" Would you *want* to associate with someone in a "B" or "C" group?
- If you think you're "hot," does this provoke you to be more discriminating or selective in your choice of friends?
- Do you want a long-term lover? What is on your lover "wish list"? Does it prioritize physical attributes, financial and social status, intellectual abilities, and emotional depths?

NOW WHAT?

- Have we lost the ability to smile, simply smile? STOP SCOWLING! IT'S NOT HOT!!!! It is amazing to me to see many attractive gay men with nasty scowls on their faces as they walk around in the gym or a bar/club.
- Relationships; are they for more than just sex? Do they require too much hard work to continue when things get tough? Do you really want one or do you just think that you do?
- If you wish to be heterosexual, would your life be easier and more fulfilling if that wish came true? If you have no such desire, what would make your present gay life feel more self-satisfying?
- Do you believe your communication skills are a problem for you? Is your communication more difficult with someone to whom you are attracted?
- Where's your sense of adventure? Can't you make decisions for yourself instead of following the "pack?" Or, does the "pack" honestly represent you?
- If you feel insecure about yourself and your communication with others, then what can you do differently?
- In what situations, interacting with others, do you wish you were more assertive and confident?
- What steps can you take toward feeling more "powerful" in your interactions with others?

I sincerely hope these questions asked and the stories told, will put you on the road toward changing problematic behaviors and leading you toward living a more complete and satisfying life.

THE END

ADDENDUM

Books About a Similar Subject to My Own

Finding the Boyfriend Within by: Brad Gooch

Gooch examines the boyfriend within all of us that needs to be acknowledged and loved. He provides the reader with specific exercises that help improve self esteem and acceptance while encouraging a plan of action toward finding more love in one's life. This book is clearly a self-help book specifically for the gay male reader.

New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999.

The Male Couple's Guide (1992), Eric Marcus provides a wonderfully in-depth look at how gay men can find one another, make a home, and build a life together. Marcus deals with issues of monogamy vs. no

monogamy and learning to make the relationship between two men work by keeping open good lines of communication. (biographical information to include here)

Now That I'm Out, What Do I Do? (Thoughts on Living Deliberately) by: Brian McNaught.

This book deals with the subjects of: "Fitting in the Gay Community." The book also provides helpful advice on marriage, finding allies to talk to, being a gay youth and "coming out" in the workplace. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.

On Being Gay (Thoughts on Family, Faith and Love) by: Brian McNaught.

McNaught's second book has such chapter titles as: "Coming Out," "Growing Up Gay," "Finding Friends and Lovers." Similar to his first book, the author presents more helpful advice for gay men in learning to live positively as a gay man, discusses issues raised by the Church, and provides supportive material gay readers to disprove many of those negative issues raised by the Church. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988.

Same Sex. Debating the Ethics, Science & Culture of Homosexuality edited by John Corvino. This book focuses on the on-going debates between various scientists, theologians, philosophers, and historians exploring the topics of the "Bible and Homosexuality" and "Gay Rights - Special Rights or Equal Rights?" This book provides more helpful information for defending one's homosexuality with those who take issue with us. Landham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1997.

Life Outside - The Signorile Report on Gay Men, Sex, Drugs, Muscles & The Passages of Life by: Michelangelo Signorile. The titles of its various sections include: "Life Outside with chapter headings of "Cult of Masculinity," "Origins of the Circuit," "Happiness in a Vial." This book explores issues for gay men on aging, monogamy, steroid usage, sex, drugs & parties. New York: Harper Perennial, 1998.

A Queer Geography - Journeys Toward a Sexual Self by: Frank Browning. Similar to his earlier book, Culture of Desire, Browning explores gay desires throughout the ages and "gay psyches" throughout the world. The author equates our search for our gay identity with America's quest for its own identity. Browning finds parallels for the terms "coming out" with "born again," equating the Puritan attitude of the "Mayflower Compact" with the rise of the back-room, bawdy houses. New York: Noonday Press, 1996.

The Rise and Fall of Gay Culture by: Daniel Harris. The author expresses his concern regarding the assimilation of the gay culture with mainstream culture. Harris presents a clear argument for gays being a separate entity from other minorities and the "melting pot majority" of America. He gives examples of the contributions of gay authors, artists, musicians, composers and others, who may lose their individuality as: "gay artists contributing to a powerful force to be reckoned with." Harris explores the central fear of having the injuries due to homophobia being diminished over time due to acceptance into the mainstream. New York: Hyperion, 1997.

Out-Standing Lives - Profiles of Lesbian and Gay Men. Michael Bronski: consulting editor: Mini-biographies on selected number of respected and note-worthy gays and lesbians in our community. The book is similar to my own only in its photographs of "outed" individuals and their personal stories. The

mini-biographies depict the lives of various writers, actors, dancers, politicians, artists and other personalities, contributing to a montage of gay lives and experiences. Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1997.

And Then I Became Gay - Young Men's Stories by: Ritch C. Savin-Williams. This book is more similar to mine in its interviews with a collection of young men detailing their experiences of being gay. Chapters detail the "coming out" process for each of these young men and their on-going joys and struggles in being young and gay in America. New York: Routledge, 1998.

The Culture of Desire- Paradox and Perversity in Gay Lives Today by: Frank Browning. This book is an exploration of various gay cultures throughout America. "Can a society based on sexual desire truly call itself a culture?" Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, 1993.

Boys Like Us, Edited by Patrick Merla: More "coming out" stories. N.Y: Avon Books, 1996.

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INTERVIEWS

1. Barton, Rick., New York, N.Y., April 15, 2001
2. Danz, Cassandra., New York. N.Y., May 19, 1998.
3. Lewis, Leonard., New York, N.Y., April 11, 1998.
4. Mhoon, Season. Hofstra University, N.Y., March, 1998.
5. Pevsner, David., New York, July 3, 1997.

6. Rogers, Tim., Yarmouth, Massachusetts, June 16, 1997.

7. Dobson, Bob, Yarmouth, Massachusetts, June 17, 1997.

The following are questions specifically designed for my interview subjects, please review and answer these questions for yourself, as if, you were subjects for my book. The responses to these questions form the basis of each subject's "Life Stories".

I. QUESTIONS FOR THE GAY MALE INTERVIEWEES

All the following questions were subject to some change.

1. Give us some background about yourself, specifically, your childhood experiences of being gay or simply different from the other children around you.
2. How and when did you "come out of the closet?"
3. How did you see yourself as a child: isolated, out-going, talkative, creative, scared?
4. How would you assess your communication skills as you traveled through life; in childhood/ adolescence/ as a young adult/ an adult? How well do you feel you communicate with other gay men?
5. For today, do you experience a more positive gay self image or does it still feel mostly negative? Why? How do you believe your self image influences your communication?
6. How do you feel speaking one-on-one in social situations? Are you honest about yourself? Are the majority of your conversations mostly superficial? When do you begin to feel safe enough to disclose more about yourself?
7. How well do you think gay men relate to one another: honestly, deeply, superficially, dramatically, angrily or, fill in the blank?
8. In either one-on-one or group communication, are you a leader or a follower and why?
9. The term, "gay-mob psychology?" Define it for yourself?
10. Being "odd man out" or "picked on": has that happened often to you? If it did, what caused that to happen and how did that influence your communication with others? If it never happened, then why not? Did your physical appearance play any part in the possible outcome?
11. Give us details as to your most satisfying gay experience? Was it during a gay event or was it during a more private moment?
12. When do you feel shame with regards to your gay identity? When do you experience guilt, and how do both these feelings affect your behavior?
13. What do you perceive are the origins or history of your feelings of shame and guilt with regards to your gay identity?
14. Do you perceive that feelings of shame or guilt have or have had an adverse affect on how you interact or relate to other gay men? Specifically, do you see attitudes of superiority and, or indifference to other gay men being a result of that shame and guilt about being gay?
15. Do you perceive those feelings of shame and guilt has also had an adverse affect upon how you interact or relate to heterosexual men and women?

16. As with myself, did you feel that "coming out" to your family and friends as a gay man, was an important step toward your acceptance of being gay?

17. Who was the most significant person in your life at the time you "came out of the closet?" What did they do that propelled you to take that step to open the door? Was your experience of that person positive or negative?

18. What is your best technique for meeting other gay men with whom you want further "interaction" in either a gay bar or social event?

19. What physical attributes do you find attractive in other gay men? What non-physical attributes do you find attractive? What attitudes do you find unattractive?

20. What do you envision as a potential future for yourself with regards to your gay life? What goals do you hope to accomplish in your lifetime and how does your acceptance of your gay identity aid you toward achieving your life goals?

QUESTIONS SPECIFICALLY ABOUT GAY COMMUNICATION

1. Do you perceive social communication with other gay men to be affected by an implied "class system" based primarily, on physical attractiveness?

2. Regarding the "game analogy" and gay male communication, do you feel that analogy fits? Yes or no? Why or why not?

3. What are your personal feelings about gay communication? Does it seem "normal" to you? Do you share any of the author's views on the subject? Why or why not?

4. How would you rate your communication skills today: with friends/ lovers/family/acquaintances? How does your communication differ with each group?

5. How do you recall your communication today differing from when you first began interacting with gay men? How did your communication change as you began to assimilate into a more gay-friendly or focused culture?

II. QUESTIONS FOR LESBIAN INTERVIEWEES

1. How do your experiences as a gay woman or a lesbian, differ from what you perceive to be the experiences of gay men you either know or have observed?

2. Do you prefer being called a lesbian or a gay woman? If you prefer being recognized as a gay woman, is it because you feel closer to gay men and don't want another term to describe yourself? Also, do you feel that gay men have a difficult time identifying themselves and why?

3. What observations do you have of gay men interacting and relating with one another? Do you feel there is serious room for improvement?
4. What effect do you perceive the feelings of shame and guilt has on how gay men interact and relate to one another?
5. Do you feel that gay women suffer from the same lack of a positive gay identity as do the gay men to whom this book is dedicated?
6. What future do you envision for the gay community if gay men and gay women can learn to deal more effectively with their shame and guilt?
7. Do you agree that feelings of shame and guilt contribute toward gay men mistreating or disrespecting one another?
8. Specifically, how do you perceive gay men mistreating or disrespecting one another...? Is it evident in their behavior toward one another individually or within groups or cliques?
9. What is your memory of "coming out of the closet?" Was it an important step toward your acceptance of your own gay identity? Also, do you feel it is easier for men or women to "come out?"
10. What advice would you like to give to other gay men who may be reading this book with regards to how they communicate with one another?

III. QUESTIONS FOR HETEROSEXUAL MEN AND WOMEN

1. Do you have family and friends who are gay?
2. What are your relationships with these gay friends and family members like?
3. Do you notice visible differences between these gay friends and family members from your heterosexual friends and family?
4. How do your gay friends or family members relate to the subject of shame and guilt? How do these feelings impact the way your gay friends and family members interact and relate to others?
5. Do you perceive that the feelings of shame and guilt impact on how heterosexual men and women interact and relate to one another? How? Does it compare to how those shameful feelings impact gay men?
6. What advice would you like to give to the gay male readers of this book with regards to the ways in which they interact or behave toward one another?

7. What positive attributes do you perceive the gay male community bestowing upon society and how could they increase the level of comfort between themselves and the heterosexual community?

8. What suggestions would you give to the heterosexual world as to how they treat gay men? What suggestions would you offer gay men with regards to how they communicate with the heterosexual world?

MARKETING THIS BOOK

I see this book becoming a valuable text for the gay man for whom it was written and about. Also, gay women and heterosexual men and women would find valuable information through the many narratives included on the subject of gay communication. I estimate the potential market for this book could include a wide variety of readers among those mentioned.

I am currently entertaining an offer from the Q Network and have received indications of interest from Viacom's new gay network, Logo, for my new TV show: Dr. Vince-GayZe in America. This show will deal with issues raised in *The Gay Communication Game* and the mores of gay culture as they affect guests, audience and viewers. The synergy with the TV audience for this show and book sales of *The Gay Communication Game* is obvious. Marketing this book in the TV talk show circuit would be another avenue to explore. Holding two doctorates in both the therapeutic field of Drama Therapy and in Theater Education, with a long teaching record at Hofstra University's Speech Communication & Rhetorical Studies Department, makes me a more credible speaker on the topic of communication. Securing appearances on such gay-friendly radio stations as WBAI-NY and others is another option.

Some other innovative ideas for marketing this book would be to provide reading sessions across the country with an emphasis on those cities with a large gay community. Examples being: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, Miami, Oklahoma City, Boston and Philadelphia. Such bookstores as A Different Light in Los Angeles and Barnes and Noble stores throughout the country, often provide new authors with readings and question & answer forums with the public along with the standard book signings.

Interviewing for the book, such well-known gay or gay-friendly celebrities as Randy Jones (of the Village People who has already agreed to be interviewed), Ellen Degeneres, Rosie O'Donnell, Sarah Bernard, Julie Halston, Rupert Everett, Junior Vasquez, Ru Paul, Victor Calderone and others, would also help to increase the marketing value.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this book proposal.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Vincent Pellegrino
201 West 89th Street, #14c
New York, N.Y. 10024



Interviewees Tim Rogers and Bob Dobson